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FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

A Novel.

BY A BARRISTER.

IN THREE VOLUMES,
VOL. I.



LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1867.

250. 0. 316.



FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.

CHAPTER I.

ONE day, during Easter Term, not a great many years ago, two barristers sat down to breakfast in chambers, at No. 8, Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn.

John Worsley was the name of the one :
Paul Petersfeld the name of the other.

Worsley, of whom I shall hereafter speak in the first person, being no other than myself, was the actual proprietor of the rooms in question. There I lived and

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worked and slept; making the most of them, both in their professional and domestic capacity.

Paul, an old college friend, and some three years my junior, owned fashionable quarters in the Albany; and beyond placing his name upon my door, and dropping in pretty regularly once a day, to ascertain that he wasn't in the least wanted, took his brieflessness as a matter of course, as if it had been one of those unimportant ailments which naturally cure themselves as people grow older.

"Energy, Worsley!" he exclaimed suddenly, in answer to some observation of mine, the tone of which seemed to strike him as objectionably paternal, "I like that! To charge me, of all men in the world, with want of energy, is too good. What on earth do you suppose I am in Lincoln's

Inn for at half-past nine this blessed May morning? Is there anything so astonishing about your chops and coffee—both capital by the bye—as to induce a fellow who wasn't a perfect miracle of energy to pound all this way from Piccadilly before most people are quite awake? Wrong for once in your life, old fellow. Think again!"

"Not I. You are here simply because, as I truly told you, dawdling down some time between eleven and twelve in a Hansom, with a cigar in your mouth, looked preciously unlike work in a three-months' barrister, and would infallibly damage your professional prospects, whatever these may be. I quite admit that you have put on a famous spurt this morning, and I advise you to stick to the plan."

"All right," returned Petersfeld, pro-

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ceeding leisurely with his breakfast. "But, do you know, Worsley, I begin to suspect that what you are pleased to call professional energy, is a confounded delusion in my case, and nothing else. What's the good of energy to a man who never has anything to do? Where's its use to a man bound hand and foot to a profession where he can't get a chance to show it? Isn't it like a good appetite to a man who hasn't got a chop like this before him—like Robinson Crusoe's tarnishing doubloons in a land with no tailors and nobody to take a bet? But, to say that I haven't got energy! Give me the chance to show it—that's all! Give me what Archimedes wanted when he offered to shunt the world! Give me——"

"Give me the coffee. What's the good of blowing off steam at this rate? Who

said you were not energetic? Of course you are, in your own way,—in any ready-made pursuit which happens to take your fancy. I have no doubt, for instance, but that you are, at this moment, about the most energetic volunteer in the ‘Devil’s Own.’ Only there are two sorts of energy, Petersfeld—male and female—as an old writer rather happily distinguishes them.”

“Interesting couple, I should say. Which is the lady?”

“Female energy,” I replied, “is the energy which waits for its work. It works well enough with what actually comes to it; but its work must come, do you understand? Female energy waits for its work.”

“Like the spider. Were you aware that spiders are all females? They are though. What’s the other?”

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"Male energy doesn't wait for its work—it finds it—makes it—does it."

"Like the policeman. By the bye, policemen are supposed to be all males. Curious coincidence. What next?"

"I simply advise you not to wait for your work. You look too far ahead. You always, in chambers at least, talk and dream of what you will do some time or another—not of what you are going to do to-day."

"To-day, my dear fellow," replied Paul, with a slight yawn, "my numerous engagements may be summed up approximately as follows:—I shall devote the next hour or so to the consumption of a pipe of cavendish and the perusal of the *Times*. From eleven till one, I shall hold quiet communion with some standard author upon the principles of equity. At

one, or thereabouts, I shall take my seat in the luncheon-room of Lincoln's Inn. Immediately afterwards, I shall array myself in complete canonicals, and proceed to inhale 'the atmosphere of the Courts,' until four o'clock. I shall endeavour to look, as much as possible, as if I had been called six years, instead of half as many months, and as if I were 'waiting for the next cause,' instead of a cause in which the plaintiff is probably at this moment employed with his coral. At four precisely my presence, as the most valuable serjeant in No. 9 company, is imperatively required in the Temple-Gardens. That's about what I'm going to do to-day. After five, a lawyer's time, you know, is entirely his own. What do you say to that, for a day's work?"

It so happened that I was at the moment

adjusting my wig and bands before the glass over the chimney-piece, with my chin rather in the air, preparatory to going into court for the day. Otherwise my reply—"Do you call *that* work?" would hardly have been resented as implying, what it certainly was never intended to imply, a disagreeable comparison.

"Call it work, indeed! It's about all the work I'm likely to get if I stick to this confounded profession till I'm as old as Adam. It's all very well for you, my boy, who've got solicitors for friends, and go into court every day of your life, with three briefs in your bag, like a little Daniel, to ask me if I call that work. If you'd got a plate of chops and I'd got a plate of sawdust, you'd ask me, I suppose, why I didn't peg away like you, and whether I called *that* eating. What next?"

"Male energy," replied I, arranging my papers. "Don't wait for the chops. Peg away at the saw-dust now. That's your work, if you only choose to make it so. But by your own admission you don't. You are not half in earnest about it. Give it up, if it doesn't suit you; but don't dawdle away the best years of your life under false pretences. There's a bit of my mind for you."

"A nice large piece too. However, there's sense in what you say, old fellow. If I don't see the result pretty near, I never do work with more than half a will. That's about it, I expect."

"Exactly. You wait for work which is to show a result at once, and in the meantime do nothing worth doing at all. You don't find your work—your real work—either in the profession or anything else."

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"Which is a state of things to be immediately rectified," observed Paul. "Just so. Now let's see what I'll do—I'll—what! going already? Why, it's hardly half-past nine."

"I've a consultation with Buttermere at the quarter to. We're in the first cause in to-day's paper."

"Au revoir, then. I perfectly agree in all you've said. I can take advice like a child, provided I get the article genuine. Hand me the *Times*, will you? I must have a smoke over all this. And, when I once do make up my mind, why then Foig-a-ballagh! as the Irish say at Donnybrook."

CHAPTER II.

“By the way, Worsley,” enquired Mr. Buttermere, as, consultation over, we walked from his chambers towards the Court, “you’ve a man of the name of Petersfeld with you in Stone Buildings, have you not?”

“Yes; we have shared chambers since his call last January.”

“Nice, amusing, gentlemanly fellow,” pursued Buttermere, in his peculiar soft, soup-eating tone. “Met him at dinner the other night. One of the Westmoreland Petersfelds, I believe. Isn’t he an eldest son, and on his way to some sort of property

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there? I fancy I have heard something about his family."

"Some day or other he comes, I believe, into a very considerable estate, with a baronetcy into the bargain. The present baronet is an unmarried uncle. In the mean time his father gives him no option but to follow the law."

"Ha! well, he couldn't do better. Does he seem to take to it, Worsley?"

"O yes; fairly enough. He is a man who may do a great deal if he chooses; and I have a strong idea that he will come out in due time. Petersfeld is one of those dashing reckless fellows to whom our work is rather a grind at starting."

"Ha! yes. My son, who was with him at Trinity, tells me that he was first-rate on the river—a sort of recognised leader in everything in the way of a lark. That I

take to be about the best sign after all in a young man. I want to ask him to dine with us some day. Will you come and meet him?"

"I shall be delighted, I am sure."

"That's well. You shall hear from Mrs. Buttermere in the course of a week. But here we are—and just in time."

I could not help secretly smiling as I followed my leader into court. Report said that three blooming olive-branches in muslin sate round the prosperous table of Mr. Buttermere. Moreover, that that learned gentleman was bound, under high connubial pains and penalties, to 'bring home' every eligible or promising young man whom he could pick up in Court or elsewhere, to be looked at by Mrs. Buttermere, and, if found eligible, appropriated, if possible, for the benefit of one or other of the

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three sedate vestals aforesaid. It was a beautiful instance of male and female energy, combining towards a virtuous end.

My own position, I may at once say, was scarcely such as to warrant Buttermere in bringing me home. I was getting on well enough for a comparative beginner, and that was all. But Paul was handsome, dashing and attractive; and moreover blessed with ultimate prospects which were of infinitely greater merit and importance in the eyes of all sensible people. So I felt that I was only to be asked for the sake of making the thing rather less palpable; and, giving Paul credit for being very well able to take care of himself, gave myself no further concern about the matter.

Our case came to an end rather sooner than we expected, and, having no other

court business on hand, I leisurely returned to chambers. Ours were on the top story of Stone Buildings, a fearful and wonderful height for human habitation. You ascend by exactly one hundred steps from the pavement outside to a suite of rooms nice enough with one rather serious exception. A long, narrow aperture, some seven feet from the ground, extending across the room just below the ceiling, is the sole substitute for a window. Through this slice of glazing, when you can reach it, you may look between the interstices of a massive stone balustrade upon the fair breadth of Lincoln's Inn Fields. To a couple of acrobats such a window would probably be the source of unmixed enjoyment, as they might regale each other with alternate peeps the whole day long. But, practically, the necessity of arranging and climbing upon furniture

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every time you wish to look abroad, becomes irksome and irritating sooner than one would easily believe.

I found Petersfeld striding backwards and forwards under this exasperating casement—his fine bronzed face on fire with excitement.

His arm-chair had been sent sprawling upon its back—his pipe lay extinct upon the table—while he crumpled and flourished a sheet of the *Times* as he walked, like a sort of preposterous pocket handkerchief.

“Found it, Jack! Found it! Told you I should! Never knew such luck in my life!”

“What’s up now?”

“Up? Why look here! Not in a hurry, are you? Sit down and read THAT!” continued he, thrusting into my hands the page containing that mysterious ‘second

column,' at which most of us glance every morning.

"There, Jack—that's the place:—'Five hundred pounds reward,' it begins. Read it out, will you, old fellow? I want to hear how the thing runs. Come, fire away!"

So with Petersfeld stalking backwards and forwards before me, looking so defiantly resolute, that it was all I could do to avoid laughing outright, I took my seat upon the edge of the table, and read as follows:—

"FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD! Disappeared lately, a YOUNG LADY, aged eighteen, of very distinguished appearance. She is slender and of middle height—dark hair and eyes—pale clear complexion, and is in manner peculiarly graceful and self-possessed. She had with her a very considerable sum of money; but, it is believed, no personal luggage whatever. She was dressed, on leaving home, in a brown silk dress, purple cloth jacket, white straw hat, trimmed with black velvet, and grebe feather. Wore a curious oriental gold bracelet, plain gold guard-chain, and watch by Rosenthal, Paris. Whoever will bring her to Mr. Bloss, solicitor, No. 14, New Square, Lincoln's Inn, or give information leading to her recovery, shall receive the above reward. Thursday, May 1."

“Now then, Worsley, what do you think of that?” exclaimed Petersfeld, as I threw down the paper. “Did you ever hear of such a chance? Give you my honour, I never did!”

“What on earth do you mean? Are you going to find her?”

“Find her! Certainly I am. My good fellow, don’t laugh. This is exactly what I wanted! Now you shall see something like energy! I take my oath I’ll find her, that’s to say, if——”

“If you can,” suggested I, quietly.

“If she’s above ground, Worsley! Of course, if I can’t, I can’t; but I tell you I will. I’ll make it my business to find her. I give you my honour I never felt as I do at this moment. *Now*, I’ve a direct object in life. Just you watch me whilst I pursue it; and then tell me I’ve no energy, if you

dare," concluded Paul, picking up his arm-chair, and arranging his neck-tie furiously at the glass.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to begin this moment?"

"Don't I. Why should I lose one hour's start? I'm going at once to Bloss. I shall pump him; get all the information I can, and probably leave London in one direction or another, by an afternoon train."

"Petersfeld! unless you have really gone barking mad, stand still for one minute. Will you listen to reason, or will you not? If not, say so, and I have done."

"Reason!" retorted Paul, looking slightly piqued; "are you going to advise me not to try? You needn't do that."

"Nothing of the kind."

"Then can't you see that there is no time to be lost. In a case of this sort every minute may tell. What's the good of conversation?"

"I really gave you credit for more sense, Petersfeld! You are just now in a mood to make a mess of the whole thing. You'll ruin your chance at first starting."

"Talk away, then," returned Paul. "Perhaps I was a little too hot, after all, but then I had considered more than you think, before you came in. Really, I ought to be very much obliged to you for taking so much trouble. So I am: that's the fact."

I am ashamed to acknowledge that the extravagant absurdity, the utter wantonness of the whole proceeding, did not strike

me as distinctly as it ought to have done at the first blush. I so thoroughly entered into Petersfeld's overwhelming desire to engage in an adventurous, exciting chase, in which every energy of mind and body might be strained to the uttermost, and in which success would afford such a glorious omen of future victories, that I simply wished to prevent his rushing into immediate and vexatious failure through sheer impetuosity in the first instance. But, in fact, any attempt at dissuasion would have been perfectly idle.

The hot spirit of pursuit was upon him—that strange indelible brand of the forest imprinted upon every human heart. Jaques was quite wrong when he piped over the stag, whose

“Big round tears
Coursed one another down his innocent nose.”

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Who that ever hunted, considered the stag's dislikings? Who has pitied the wise and wonderful fox, or the hare—so docile and original, so glad to be an affectionate diverting fire-side companion, instead of that changed and ghastly fugitive which nobody who has ever seen flying, can ever forget? Who ever suggested that a woodcock minded being winged? What sailor ever gave a thought to the feelings of his chase, while overhauling her hand over hand to the glorious banging of his big bow gun? And if a young lady of eighteen objected to being dogged about the country by an exuberant young barrister of three-and-twenty, for no earthly reason except that he wanted occupation, and had made up his mind to catch her, had she any special ground of complaint, after having advisedly placed herself in the catalogue of *feræ naturæ*?

"All this will cost money, Paul," I observed. "No use going into an affair of this kind unless you mean to spend. Hast thou 'put money in thy purse?'"

"Good Iago, be easy upon that score. I had an odd twenty guineas or so, which I was keeping for Switzerland in the Long. They will shortly be in my cigar-case for this especial purpose."

"It will also cost time," pursued I. "Our courts won't be up this week."

"All the worse for them. What can a few days, more or less, matter to me? Our Easter vacation begins almost directly, and I shall have the whole of that quite free. Anyhow, I go to-night; that is, if I see reason."

"One more question: do you know Bloss?"

"Not I. I shall call upon him in conse-

quence of his advertisement. Isn't that regular enough?"

"Suppose you take my card. Bloss and I come from the same part of the world, and we always nod when we meet. Scratch out my name, in pencil, and write your own. It may serve as a sort of introduction; at least, I think he'll consider it as such."

"Thank you very much. What sort of fellow is he? By the way, how had I better begin? That's a point I hadn't quite considered."

"Bloss is a great, fat, good-natured fellow, who will talk and laugh with you for half-an-hour 'together, without letting you be one bit wiser than he chooses. I should say that the more frankly you go to work the better. Don't let him, at any rate, fancy that you are laying traps for him.

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If you do, he'll shut up at once. Go in and win. Shall we meet in Hall?"

"Haven't an idea. All I know is, that I'm down upon Bloss within the next two minutes."

CHAPTER III.

AT five o'clock on every evening during Term time, we Chancery lawyers hold pleasant festival in the great dining-hall of Lincoln's Inn.

At the tables, running lengthways, towards the lower end of the hall, sit the students, divided into messes of four. Above, at the cross-tables, distributed in the same manner, dine the barristers; whilst higher still, entrenched behind a sort of oaken rampart, and raised upon a daïs, the benchers of the Inn regale themselves—it

is believed—upon the fare of the rich man's table.

That the assisting at a certain number of these dinners should be an indispensable preliminary to a call to the bar has always been a fruitful subject of pleasantries among people of the 'funny' class, who are perhaps unnecessarily numerous. Of course I am not going to explain, in these casual pages, any of our esoteric doctrines—our calm, professional mysteries, which *propter simplicitatem laicorum*, we habitually keep to ourselves. That would never do. But I can safely declare that I have enjoyed few dinners more than those at which I 'ate my terms,' while for plain fare and good company, I ask nothing better than the bar-table at Lincoln's Inn.

Petersfeld and I entered the hall almost at the same moment.

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"Just seen old Bloss," he whispered.
"Got a mess? Tell you all about it afterwards."

And so the dinner began.

Our two comrades at the board were Brocklebank and Millworth: one a large, red, lusty, noisy man; the other singularly composed and quiet, with an olive complexion and a soft voice. So remarkable an advertisement as that which had just roused the curiosity of half London in the morning papers, was not likely to pass without comment at the bar-table.

"I say," exclaimed Brocklebank, who was lecturer in some branch of jurisprudence at Lincoln's Inn, "seen that queer advertisement to-day, Worsley, about the beauty in brown silk? Richest thing I've known this long time! By George, I expect to

find my class empty to-morrow. All our students will be after her."

"You must have a very mild opinion of all our students," observed Millworth.

"Lord bless you, why?" retorted Brocklebank, with his strong, loud laugh. "You'll be after her yourself, Millworth, I shouldn't wonder. I can fancy the sly, innocent way you'll go purring and peeping about, and how you'll come back with your eyes half shut and a perpetual smile, asking us all, confidentially, if we know of a nice snug investment for £500 or so!"

"I assure you," said the other, with unchangeable suavity, "you do me far too much credit. Besides, if I were really such an egregious rascal as to undertake the experiment, I ought to have made my fortune long ago."

"Well done, Millworth!" said I, while

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Petersfeld flushed perplexedly, embarrassed with the weight of his own secret. "How do you know that I'm not on the track myself?"

"If you are, I wish you joy of it," returned my neighbour with his easy smile. "You have had the benefit of a candid opinion, at all events. But, seriously, Worsley, what a hideous state of mind must that man be in who could undertake such an adventure for the sake of the paltry reward."

"Not so paltry, after all. Besides, one offers—the other earns. Is there any harm in that?"

"Worsley, you are a gentleman. If you wish to test the utter baseness of such a pursuit, just consider what the young lady herself would think of the man who could be vile enough to follow and molest her

without any conceivable inducement or excuse, beyond the miserable hope of pocketing some few hundred pounds. Of course we are all now speaking in joke, but I should really like to tell that man my opinion of him. I should indeed."

"Isn't that Millworth all over?" shouted Brocklebank. "What a virtuous man he is! Now, I've no doubt whatever but that this young woman is as thorough-going *franche aventurière* as ever met monsieur Gil Blas. Where did she get the 'very considerable sum of money' she seems to have sidled away with in her dainty pocket? She's a naughty little fashionable thief in my opinion. She has robbed somebody who was fool enough to trust her; and, I'll bet you what you like, ought not only to be caught, but whipped into the bargain, for all her distinguished appearance."

"To my mind, noo," came a deliberate northern voice from the adjoining mess, "I've listened to two vara indifferent opinions, where I would have thought to have heard two wise ones."

"What's the matter now, Kinghorn?" cried Brocklebank. "Don't you believe she's a thief?"

"Do you want any more of my mind about hunting her?" inquired Millworth.

"I think ye may be both strangely in the wrong. I think ye have both taken extreme views; neither of which was there any need to take."

"In medio tutiùs ito," suggested Millworth.

"As to this young lassie," continued Kinghorn, placing his elbows square upon the table, and helping himself to a stupendous pinch from the snuff-box which forms

part of the regulation-furniture of every bar-mess, "I can detect no reason whatever for concluding her to be a thief. Far more likely to my mind she is quite innocent and virtuous, and has rin awa' from home through some love-trouble, which was na kindly taken by those about her. Many girls do flit away for the like reason. As to the lots of siller spoken of in the advertisement, what would be quantities to Mr. Brocklebank or myself, mightn't be so much out of the ordinary to a well-to-do lassie. Anyhow, she has fled away from the bosom of her family, or those who have the caring for her, which is indubitably the right place for her at eighteen. And it seems to me that he who can recover and win her back before she falls into some terrible pit of misery, and maybe of sin, which may happen to any girl of that

simple age wandering alone, would well deserve five hundred pounds and more for the good office."

"Well, we must let her alone for the present. They're going to say grace."

"Petersfeld," said I, as we rose from table, "are you off for the evening, or will you smoke your pipe in chambers first?"

"Certainly. I want to tell you what happened this afternoon. Are you going there now?"

"Yes, and I'll bring Kinghorn. He has a first-rate head for a matter of this kind. If you have anything to discuss, you couldn't have a better adviser."

"Is he safe, do you think? You know what I mean. I mustn't have this talked about."

"To be sure he is. Besides, he has committed himself, you see, to the doctrine of in-

tervention, and Kinghorn never changed his mind in his life. Go on, and I'll bring him."

And so, within ten minutes time, we were all three seated in that legal eyrie of which I have already made mention, with pipes alight, coffee brewing upon the hob, and ready to dispose of any conceivable question which could be submitted to a council of counsellors.

"I am well satisfied to be here," began Kinghorn, quietly adopting to himself the arm-chair and foot-stool of our chamber establishment; "because I'll advise with you, Worsley, upon a point of copyhold which was much pressed upon me this morning. Hereditaments parcel of the Manor of A., and held . . ."

"Pardon me one moment, Kinghorn. We want to ask your advice upon a point which concerns our friend here, personally.

Would you mind clearing his mind upon a private matter, in the first instance, before we go to the Manor of A.? Afterwards, my time for the rest of the evening is quite at your disposal."

"By all means, my dear Worsley—by all means! It is I who should ask pardon. Of what would you speak?"

"Of the young lady whose case we just now discussed in Hall. Petersfeld is going to find her."

"That's news, indeed!" exclaimed Kinghorn, with a look of unqualified interest. "I am glad, on my soul, that such a pursuit should be undertaken by a gentleman so likely to bring it to a creditable issue. Maybe you are acquainted with the lassie's whereabouts, or have some other information to guide you? Is it so, sir?"

"Wish I had," returned Petersfeld. "I

got some information this morning—rather less than I should have liked—from Mr. Bloss, whose name you may remember in the advertisement. If you could help me to make head or tail of it, I should really be obliged. Every man's opinion is worth taking at the outset in a case like this; and yours, of course, Mr. Kinghorn, would be a great favour."

This was said rather in the sort of blunt shy way in which, of olden time, we who were not then very old, were wont to avail ourselves, as a disagreeable convenience, of the opinion of our elders.

"You have only to ask my mind to know it," replied Kinghorn. "Well enough do I remember Bloss. If I had a hind leg to be talked off I'd take it to Bloss. But, in the meantime, let us hear what he said; and give me, if you have it, a copy of this

advertisement, which is the chief matter after all. Thank you. Proceed now, Mr. Petersfeld, if you please."

And Paul, seating himself astride of a chair with its back towards us, as if delivering his experience from the top of a small and unusually stiff-necked pony, detailed for our benefit the result of the first step instigated by those euphonious syllables—
'Five hundred pounds reward!'

CHAPTER IV.

It may seem scarcely fair upon Petersfeld to intercept him from giving, in the first person, his own account of the interview between himself and Mr. Bloss. But an historian is bound to consult the convenience of his readers, even at the expense of strict justice to his *dramatis personæ*. And, in the present instance, it demanded so much conversational cross-questioning to extract the story entire, that I intend to undertake it myself, as the shorter and more intelligible course.

Lincoln's Inn clock had just struck two,

as Paul arrived at the great yellow door, No. 14, New Square, which bore the inscription in large black letters, 'MR. BLOSS.'

As the postern of the forty thieves unlocked itself spontaneously upon the very shallow suggestion 'open sesame!' so did Mr. Bloss's outer oak spring backward, as of its own accord, at Petersfeld's decided rap.

Within was the indistinct vista of a passage, terminating in a green baize door; with certain pens or pews on the right, in which the work which we barristers conventionally depreciate as 'clerical,' was apparently in course of performance.

"Yes—?" inquired the voice of the invisible gentleman, who had pulled the string, which raised the latch, which opened the door. "Yes—?"

"Yes," replied Petersfeld, with com-

posure. He was now fairly embarked on his enterprise, and it would never do to be trifled with at starting.

A round sleek face appeared over the nearest pew door; and the owner having satisfied himself that Paul was what he inwardly designated as a 'swell,' at once let himself out, and appeared in the passage.

"Wish to see Mr. Bloss, sir? What name shall I say?"

"Be good enough to say that Mr. Petersfeld, of Stone Buildings, would be glad of five minutes conversation. Have the kindness, also, to hand him my card."

"Certainly, sir," replied the clerk. "Mr. Bloss is just at this moment engaged with a gentleman from Oxfordshire; but if you'll sit down for one minute or so, he'll be happy to see you. There, that's his bell! Go in, Tommy."

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Tommy, whose clerical duties were apparently exercised in an adjoining pew, at once obeyed orders, and presently returned with a considerable tin tray which filled the whole outer office with a savour of beef steak and onions, and upon which an empty pewter tankard suggested that those delicacies had been pleasantly washed down.

"Now, sir, I'll take your card in," said the first clerk; and whether the gentleman from Oxfordshire had been smuggled off under the tin tray, or how otherwise his exit had been effected, as it most certainly had, must be left to the conjectures of the inquisitive. At all events, Petersfeld was at once ushered through the green-baize door, and found Mr. Bloss alone.

"Happy to see you, Mr. Petersfeld—very happy indeed," exclaimed the solicitor. "I

find your name upon Mr. Worsley's card. Always glad to meet any friend of Mr. Worsley. Know his family well."

Here Mr. Bloss pushed back his arm-chair from the table, and courteously motioning Paul to an opposite seat, inspected him with a jolly, benevolent air, as if the departed gentleman from Oxfordshire had left him in a most even and enviable frame of mind.

It would be a rare world, indeed, and not without its recommendations, which should be peopled exclusively with gentlemen cut out after the exact pattern of Mr. Bloss. Fancy our streets crowded with nothing but enormously protuberant, white-waistcoated, elderly men, with immense flaxen faces, no hair to speak of, pitcher lips, three chins apiece, and unsteady blue eyes which float ever so long right and left before they seem

to lay hold of anything in particular. Fancy them all lolling and bobbing about, perpetually saying, "ha, ha!" and what a fine day it was, to each other, never grumbling, never discontented, never in anything but the best of spirits, and think how charmingly we should all get on.

"Happy to meet you," repeated Bloss, rolling his plump white hands together, and kicking his immense legs into a listening attitude. "What can I have the pleasure of doing for Mr. Petersfeld?"

"I have troubled you, Mr. Bloss, in consequence of an advertisement, mentioning your name, which appeared in the *Times* this morning. I have a strong idea that I can find the young lady."

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Bloss. "Delighted to hear that. Heartily hope you can. Haven't got her outside, have you?"

Not left her to play with those good little boys in the office, I hope,—hey?”

“Certainly not. I shall take better care of her than that. I ought, however, to explain that my object in troubling you, at present, is simply to ask whether you can give me any information beyond that contained in the advertisement—the young lady’s name, residence, and so forth, for instance.”

“I can give you one very material piece of information,” replied Bloss, settling himself cosily in his chair, and tapping a paper-knife upon his desk—“and that is, that the £500 will be paid across this very table, upon production of the young lady. That’s a point, sir, which, perhaps, you took for granted; but it ought to be gratifying to a practical man like yourself, considering how these sort of things are sometimes

managed—in fact, how they are managed every day. The cheque is in this drawer, sir. And this is the key.”

“I never doubted it for one moment, Mr. Bloss; the advertisement being in your name.”

“My name! ho, ho, ho! That’s true enough; but I’m not the advertiser,” interrupted Bloss, with his comfortable laugh. “The advertisement is not mine, my dear sir, one bit more than yours. I’m to pay—that’s all. I hold the money, and wait for the lady. I’m a cat’s paw in the affair—nothing else. I can’t give you any further help, not I. I’m not instructed to do it. I’m told not to do it. Bring the lady—take the cheque. That’s all.”

“In that case,” returned Petersfeld, not a little disconcerted, “I’m sorry I troubled you. Worsley told me that I might expect

from you the ordinary information, whatever that may mean. However, if I am simply wasting your time and my own, I had better wish you good day at once, and beg pardon for intruding."

"No, no, no!" replied Mr. Bloss. "Sit down again, my dear sir, do. Don't run away as if I wouldn't give you every sort of information in my power, because I will. Only, unluckily, the best piece of advice I can give you—always supposing that you don't know more than I do about this business—is to let it alone."

"If that's the case," retorted Paul, "what's the meaning of this confounded advertisement?"

"Ha, ha, ha! What, of course? Well, the fact is," continued Bloss, struggling between the keen enjoyment of an interesting mystery, amusement at Petersfeld's

absurd crotchet, and the obligations of professional reticence—"the fact is, speaking to you, Mr. Petersfeld, as a barrister, and wishing, of course, to afford you every assistance in my power—the fact is, that this young lady escaped, eloped—levanted is, I believe, the correct word—upwards of a fortnight ago."

"The deuce she did?"

"Ha, ha! it's a fact though. Her——father," continued Bloss, cautiously baulking himself before every word which might betray more than he intended—"knowing old customer as ever lived, naturally thinks to himself, 'least said, soonest mended'—keeps all quiet in the first instance, and simply sets two Scotland-yard detectives upon her track before she had been twelve hours out of his gates. Don't you see, it was everything that the scandal of this sort

of escapade shouldn't get wind in the county?"

"To be sure! And so the detectives failed?"

"Failed! I believe you. As I said just now, they were hot-foot after her before she was well over the lawn. They knew all that you know from the advertisement—and more too. Much more, of course. Yet not one trace of the girl did they ever manage to discover. Not a bit of it. From that day to this she has just as much disappeared as if she had been sunk in the sea. By the way, that reminds me:—every likely port in the kingdom has been watched day and night; so I'm told. It's the most extraordinary thing I ever knew, Mr. Petersfeld; and that's the fact. Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the present advertisement?"

"Why, don't you see? She must be

somewhere. The detectives have done their outside. They've come home and said 'no go.' Therefore, the only chance is to appeal to those who've got her. £500 is a good lot of money, Mr. Petersfeld, as we both know; and if that doesn't tempt them to hand her over, or lead to some account of her, why," continued Mr. Bloss, rolling himself up more cosily than ever, and stabbing himself playfully with his paper-knife, "why, that's about the end of the story, I take it."

"You said something about being a mere cat's-paw in the business. You'll excuse my curiosity, I am sure. I shall not trouble you again."

"O law! don't mention it. Ask what you like, Mr. Petersfeld. Cat's-paw, indeed, ha, ha! that's just what I am. Don't you see, this clever old gentleman who would manage it all himself, advertisements and

everything, didn't want his own solicitors' names to appear in the matter. There was a reason for that. If they had, all their clerks would have guessed directly who the young lady was. Their house had acted for her father in a chancery suit, to which she was a party. However, never mind about that. He didn't want those clerks to get wind of the thing, and go talking right and left—as of course they would. Law, you've no idea how clerks do talk. So he just told his people to put it into my hands, so far as the reward was concerned; that's all. My chaps here know no more of the family than the men in the moon, so they can't tell tales. The other chaps, there, not having the thing popped under their noses, as it were, don't think about her more than anybody else. In fact, my name appearing, you see, they're cock-sure

the matter doesn't concern any of *their* clients. It was a neat dodge, that, indeed—ha, ha !”

“I will trouble you with only one question more,” said Petersfeld. “The advertisement mentions a considerable sum of money.”

“So it does. Large sum, indeed. Very large. Quite a little fortune. Just about the funniest part of the whole affair, that is. But really, Mr. Petersfeld, I shall be telling more than I ought if I don't shut up soon, and upon my honour, I've told you a great deal. Hope you don't think I should have done as much for everybody, ha?”

“Certainly not,” replied Petersfeld rising. “You have told me everything which as it seems I could, under the circumstances, fairly ask, and I am exceedingly obliged.

Good-day, Mr. Bloss. I am afraid you must wait until next week for the young lady!"

"Good-day — good-day!" laughed the jolly old gentleman, ringing his bell. "Law bless me, what a funny start it is, to be sure," repeated he to himself, long after Petersfeld had disappeared in the passage. "Only to think of the advertisement of a runaway girl in a newspaper, setting a young chap wild like that! What upon earth does he want with her? Is he going to take his reward out in love or money, I wonder? Ha, ha, ha!"

"And yet," continued Mr. Bloss, musing to himself, "what a strange round things do run, to be sure! That I should have drawn that will more than forty years ago! That I should have had charge of that child when she first landed in England! And now, that this boy should come to me for infor-

mation about her—knowing just as much of Miss Helen, as I do of next month's baby! Almost wish I had told him more. Give a good deal to think she was in safe hands again. But it would have been no use—no use at all! Very strange the whole thing is, but as for Petersfeld—ha, ha, ha!”

And so diverting did Mr. Bloss consider his recent conversation, that he merrily recounted it that self-same evening to his son and heir, Mr. Eldon Bloss, barrister-at-law, over a chosen bottle of port, with strict injunctions not to let the cat out of the bag upon any account whatever.

Unluckily Mr. Eldon's bag was about as unsafe an enclosure as his papa's. But whether or not this piece of paternal and after-dinner confidence was justified by the result, must be discovered in a future chapter.

CHAPTER V.

"WELL," exclaimed I, as Petersfeld concluded his narrative, "Bloss has been a great deal more communicative than I should have expected. I suppose he felt himself a cat's-paw, as you say, and behaved accordingly. But, after all, are we much wiser than before? If we are, I don't seem to see it."

"How does it strike you, Mr. Kinghorn?" inquired Paul, quietly disparaging my remark. "Worsley, there, never does see things. He'd be Chancellor one of these days, if he could."

"It strikes me," replied Kinghorn gravely, "that this visit of yours, Mr. Petersfeld, has been by no means unproductive. I am inclined to opine that it throws a new light altogether, upon this advertisement."

"You think so!" cried Paul, immensely pleased. "Well, now, if you wouldn't mind telling us what you think about the whole matter, I should be really obliged. Of course I gathered something from Bloss, but I have hardly had time to think it into shape, yet."

"Very strange," observed Kinghorn thoughtfully, "was the foolish failure of those detectives, placed upon the track as it were, just the minute the lassie escaped from bounds, and yet dumbfounded from the outset. A private man may indeed be a great fule, which need never be wondered at, seeing he may have been taught no

better. But these men, one would suppose, were trained to their trade, and that a young girl should all at once outwit them, and flee away from under their noses, without leaving trace or track behind, passes my comprehension altogether. The present reward would make me think they were not ill-fee'd, and yet they must have been strangely remiss."

"We shall come to about the same conclusion, Kinghorn, after all," observed I.

"By no means. For mark you this : when I cast my eye over the advertisement this morning, it never occurred to me that the 'considerable sum of money' mentioned therein, need be more than a weel-filled purse of gold, such as any young lady of rank and position—as the present undoubtedly is—might be supposed to have at her command. You may recollect that I stated

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as much just now in Hall. And indeed, £500 would be no more than friends might well offer for the recovery of such a girl, without any respect to her belongings. But now Bloss has told us that this sum of money is another thing altogether! Quite a little fortune, you say, were his own words. This alters the case most strangely. Heaven help her, she must have purloined it!"

"Purloined it!" exclaimed Petersfeld with an indignant start. "Impossible! You are joking, Mr. Kinghorn."

It was useless to struggle against the explosion provoked by this fiery and unlooked for bit of championship. Luckily Petersfeld saw the matter in our light, and laughed as loud as we.

"Still, Mr. Kinghorn," he persisted, "I don't see why you should come to any such conclusion without even the shadow of evi-

dence to support it. There is nothing that I know of, either in the terms of the advertisement, or in what Bloss has told us, inconsistent with the money having been her own."

"How do you suppose she may have earned it, sir?" enquired Kinghorn dryly.

"Earned it! I am not going to suppose anything of the kind. . But why may it not have been left to her—been her own fortune, in fact? Nothing more likely."

"Left to her? her own fortune?" repeated Kinghorn, looking at Paul, with a half curious, half compassionate expression. "Why now, a parson's daughter might have propounded to me that query well enough, but surely not Mr. Petersfeld of Stone, Buildings. Will you tell me this, sir—Who would have taken her receipt?"

"True enough," rejoined Paul, after

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a moment's reflection. "Of course at eighteen she could not give a discharge for money."

"I doubt if there be a young lady—heiress or no heiress—aged eighteen, within the united kingdom," pursued Kinghorn, abstractedly, with the tone of one who has been in contact with ignorance, "who at this moment could lawfully put, say a couple of thousands, into her pocket, and proceed to expend it after her own sweet will—let alone in gallanting about the country on her own hook. It could not be, sir."

"What are we to conclude then?" demanded Petersfeld, with a gasp of despair.

"Let us conclude nothing against the young lady's probity without further testimony. Many a suspicious matter admits

of being explained easily, which is incomprehensible for want of knowing one simple fact. When I employed the word 'purloined,' I made use perhaps of a term for which there was no need. But now, observe. From whomsoever's custody or keeping that money was removed, as it undoubtedly was, it must have been carried away in notes, or paper of some sort. And, knowing thus much, it scarcely can be difficult to discover that person's name and abode. And thereupon, you have made a grand step at once."

"He would advertise, you mean?"

"Surely. What man do you suppose would sit down and blink, with his hands before him, in such a state of affairs. He would stop the notes—if notes they were—at the Bank, and advertise in all the papers. You may depend upon that. And he

would do so, mind you, the first moment he discovered his ill-fortune, which, according to your information, may well be some weeks ago. This is but a suggestion, you'll observe, Mr. Petersfeld, which you must work out for yourself. I only affirm that if this 'very considerable sum of money' has not been already advertised, it is more than strange: and that, if you are only canny enough to pick out the right advertisement, you will have made a strong beginning."

"It's a good idea, anyhow," exclaimed Petersfeld. "But suppose after all she happened to carry it away in cash?"

"Whoo, now! that's a bright notion, truly! Why, man, a couple of thousands, even, in sovereigns, is more than any lassie living would travel under far, were it all she had to keep her for ever. Besides, though

I've seen the value of such a sum in a house, or a steamer, or maybe a drove of black beasts, I never yet saw it together in stamped gold, except at the mint indeed; neither I'll wager did you."

"Well, I've no doubt but you're right. Can you suggest any further clue?"

"I can. Have you not just heard that the lassie disappeared some three weeks back?"

"All the worse for me, I should say."

"Not quite. It is indubitably discouraging to find that she has been pursued by detectives so long in vain. Nevertheless, to my mind it opens just this chance. The advertisement I hold in my hand is not addressed, you see, to herself."

"No. To use Bloss' words, it is addressed to those who've got her."

"It is. And you recollect he added that the scandal of this escapade, as he named

it, was to be avoided by all means. That's just why the present step, careful as it is, has been so long delayed. That's why they don't give you an address, or an initial even, don't you see. But I would engage that some notice intended for the young lady's eye alone has already appeared; and knowing what you now know, or may adroitly discover, there's no saying but that it might supply a link at least. In short, you must just lay side by side everything that you can find out any way which seems likely to bear upon the present matter, and I doubt not but that, with perseverance and good luck, Mr. Petersfeld, you may at last lay hold of the clew-rope; and then, with a long pull and a strong pull, who knows but you may even end by hauling in the young leddie herself. Never was neater description laid on paper than that with which her

friends have provided you in this present advertisement. And so I wish you the needful luck very honestly."

"I'm immensely obliged indeed," returned Paul. "You'll excuse me, I'm sure, if I leave you at once. I shall just drop down to my club, and look through last month's file of the *Times*. Good night, Worsley. I shall send you a line some day to let you know my whereabouts. And, if I shouldn't turn up in a hurry, don't put me in the paper, that's all."

"Strange, vary," muttered Kinghorn, as Paul disappeared. "Is he gone off, think you, without bag or baggage, to seek after this anonymous hussy? According to the advertisement, she's just as ill provided. So they'll make but an untidy couple."

"O dear no. We share chambers here during the day; but Petersfeld has his own,

or rather his father's, rooms in the Albany. He comes down here pretty regularly—as early as breakfast now and then—just to show that he is really one of us.”

“I see. One hundred fi’ pound notes is a handful indeed. He would like it?”

“Like it? Probably he would. However, I’m quite certain that’s not his object in this present instance. I believe that, so far as Petersfeld knows his own mind, he is entirely actuated by a restless adventurous spirit, which must cut out immediate work for itself, the more arduous the better. Besides, in this instance, there is a tinge of romance—curiosity to gratify, with perhaps a bit of gallantry into the bargain. Surely this is enough to account for the whim of an unemployed and impetuous young man.”

“Undoubtedly. And I wish him winning luck with all my heart, for he’s a nice

gentlemanly lad; indeed. But faith, Worsley, to run your nose into places where you're neither asked for nor expected, is just the Deil and St. Dunstan over again. And we all know what happened of that. The present is not a common case, I am certain; and I'd have your friend look out for something beside purring and velvet paws. Not that I would dissuade him from the adventure altogether, since he has set his heart upon it. But he may cry 'would it were bed-time and all well!' like old John Falstaff at Shrewsbury, before he finds himself fairly through the business, and safe out on the other side. And now maybe you'd not mind turning over with me the copyhold query, of which we began to speak awhile ago?"

"With the greatest pleasure," returned I. And we were soon deep in the discussion of

an entertaining controversy, touching the exact position of the representatives of a defunct copyholder, late tenant of the Manor of A.

And the same hour beheld Petersfeld seated in the most sequestered corner of his Club library, diligently conning over the last month's file of the *Times*, between a towering pair of silver candlesticks, which he had ordered the waiter to place beside him, upon either hand ; so that no possible mistake in his investigations should occur through want of sufficient light.

And here it becomes necessary to divert the course of our narrative, in order to make room for other people whose turn has come to appear upon the stage.

CHAPTER VI.

FOUR or five days, if I remember rightly, had elapsed since the occurrences of my last chapter, during which I had heard nothing whatever of Petersfeld. I knew his independent, unbusiness-like habits better than to expect him to write, without any particular necessity. In fact, to take any sort of trouble 'for fun,' as he called it, was altogether out of his line. And, being at the time unusually pressed with work, I took very little heed of his absence, satisfied that he would turn up, some fine morning, just as easily as he had disappeared.

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The first news I heard of him was in a letter, bearing the Paris post mark, which I found, with two or three others, upon my breakfast table. It was short :—

“ Grand Hotel,
“ Boulevard des Capucins,
“ Tuesday.

“ DEAR WORSLEY,

“ In Paris, as you see. Full on the scent, thanks to Kinghorn; but just now at a confounded check. Expect me at Stone Buildings some time to-morrow.

“ Yours ever,

“ PAUL G. PETERSFELD.”

Another note, written in a clear, feminine hand, said :—

“ Mr. and Mrs. Buttermere request the honour of Mr. John Worsley's company at dinner in Harley Street on Friday next, the 9th instant, at seven o'clock.”

There was a corresponding envelope addressed to Petersfeld ; evidently a counterpart of mine, and which I accordingly took the liberty of opening and answering in his name. I had no objection myself to the capital dinner which Buttermere always hung out ; and I knew that Petersfeld liked to extend the circle of his visiting acquaintance in all respectable directions.

Moreover, nothing vexes a man of the world more than to have left an invitation of any sort unanswered, even for a single post. It is one of those cases in which excuses count for little ; being a simple crime in itself, like sending letters without stamps, or calling people by wrong names.

Perhaps the reader may like to accompany these twin notes of acceptance to their destination, and make acquaintance at once

with the three young ladies of whose existence he has already become aware.

"There, girls !" exclaimed Mrs. Buttermere, tossing the notes upon the table, at which her daughters sat engaged in various feminine occupations around the evening lamp. "That's fortunate. We shall just make up fourteen at dinner on Friday. Mr. Worsley and Mr. Petersfeld are both coming. Here's our list ; so you may set to work and arrange it among yourselves. I'll just look in and tell your papa that it's all settled. He'll like to know."

Whether that eminent Queen's Counsel liked to know anything unconnected with the contents of the great white briefs, which he systematically devoured after dinner, and digested until bed-time, is not so certain. But, at all events, their mamma's absence gave the young ladies the opportunity of

discussing that fashionable domestic puzzle—how shall they sit—entirely at their leisure.

Charlotte, Louisa, and Belinda were the names of these damsels. Collectively, however, they were better known as 'Lotty, Loo, and Linda' among those of the junior members of our fraternity who had the luck to enjoy an *entrée* to the house in Harley Street. And, to tell the truth, there were a good many stories current touching transactions between various young gentlemen whose first wig was still crisp and curly, and the several partners in that elegant firm. This, however, is no business of mine.

Now, whensoever there chance to be three maiden daughters of one house, it invariably happens, if the experience of centuries is to count for anything, that the youngest is all

that is nice and lovely; the elders jealous and unkindly disposed.

From the age of Khosrou Schah, whose unparalleled matrimonial disasters are recorded in the Arabian Nights,—from the birth-day of Cinderella, or that of the unlucky Beauty of Beastly memory,—from the time of Regan and Goneril,—the rule has constantly held good. Nobody, therefore, need be surprised to find that Linda enjoyed the proper advantages, and paid the peculiar penalties of her birthright. But more of her in her turn.

Lotty, the senior partner, was of the venerable age of twenty-one. She was blonde, moderately handsome, and the victim of a dissatisfied spirit. The world, according to her thinking, was not altogether as happy a place as it might have been. Its grapes hung high, and were probably sour and

dusty. Whether she had been disappointed in her own private gleaning, is more than I can tell. But it was early days to disbelieve in that ladder of gold—so long delayed, so often raised when least expected.

One remembers a cynical French saying—that in thinking over the misfortune of our best friend, there is always the germ of a pleasant sensation. In the present instance, the theory received an illustration. Whatever may have been Lotty's particular crosses, they attracted a very mild amount of sympathy from her junior partners, who, on the contrary, were in the habit of posting up in the private ledgers of memory all her peevish sayings and doings, for reproduction at inconvenient opportunities.

In every contest for a favourite cavalier—seat in a carriage, or place at a pic-nic, it was so atrociously delightful to be able

to say—"O, Lotty doesn't care for this sort of thing. She's so good she won't mind;" a quiet process of annihilation which would probably have disconcerted a saint, had Lotty been such in good earnest.

Loo, the second partner, was some two years younger than her sister—handsomer, cleverer, and anything but used up. Her first object in life was to cut out Lotty by some splendid *coup* in the matrimonial bazaar. Her second, to escape the being cut out by Linda, who was bent upon winning, and in fact coming up at a dangerous pace. The very idea, good gracious, of the celebrated firm coming to grief that way, and suddenly collapsing into "Lotty and Loo—spinsters," was a great deal too dismal for sober realisation. Unluckily, it appeared anything but an improbable wind-up of the existing business.

Fair, like her sisters, Linda's figure was *petite* and faultless, whilst her delicately-modelled features had that peculiar and indescribable charm which so rarely survives the school-room. Very few faces retain that bewitching air of *naïvete* and innocence up to the time when its value would be beyond all price. And hers, to use an expression which is at least intelligible, was a regular little kitten-face ; now so deliciously demure, now, in an instant lighting up, as if fun or mischief were the only things in the world worth living for.

Her complexion was the most perfect thing you ever saw, and her hands—O those wonderful little white hands !—ought to have had a chapter all to themselves in Dr. Bell's Bridgewater treatise. To call those twinkling fairy fingers 'organs,' was plain profanation. Anyone could see that they

were not constructed for mere every-day useful purposes. They had, indeed, much more destructive work before them, and had already endangered many a young gentleman's peace of mind. And they would probably continue to do so again and again, until at last one of them should be imprisoned in a tiny gold circlet, by way of pledge that they, one and all, should thereafter keep the peace, and do mischief no more for ever.

Besides these advantages, Linda dressed better than her sisters, partly, perhaps, from better taste—partly, certainly, from more extensive opportunities. For Buttermere, who was quite foolish over his youngest pet, had a way of every now and then giving her his gloves to mend; when, owing doubtless to the prodigious amount of fees which diurnally travelled through the hands of

that learned gentleman, a stray sovereign or so was frequently found lodged in the thumb.

And it was quite a treat to see the paternal visage expand, as Linda jumped upon his knee with the resuscitated gloves, exclaiming, "There, papa! Aren't they nicely sewn? Do you know, I don't wonder you found them uncomfortable! If you only knew the no end of work I've had clearing all sorts of rubbish out of the fingers!"

Now it is no part of my business to tell tales of my characters, or even allude to their failings unnecessarily. Therefore, lest anything which it may fall within my province hereafter to relate should happen to convey a disadvantageous impression of little Linda, I wish everybody distinctly to recollect that her chances and education

had been sadly against her, and to lay the saddle upon the right horse.

Her mother, a mere worldly woman of little sense, would have spoilt most girls in her unblushing attempts to pitchfork them into matrimony. "Train up a child in the way she shouldn't go, and when she grows up will be time to depart from it" is a maxim neither safe nor sound, albeit acted upon by wiser people than Mrs. Buttermere. Her father's petting was scarcely less injudicious, and placed her in a false position with regard to her sisters; who, in their turn, were perhaps in some small degree less inexcusable for uncharity towards a sisterly rival.

Such, however, was the firm; in which, if the partners didn't see their way towards pulling all together, there was quite as much cordiality, and probably less discord,

than I have known in certain grand commercial houses doing real business in this city of London.

But it is time to return to the drawing-room table.

"Read out the card, Linda!" exclaimed Loo. "Don't keep it all to yourself. We want to know who's coming."

"All right, Loo, my dear. First of all Mr. Justice Brindlebun and Lady Brindlebun."

"Well, that settles itself. Papa takes my lady. Mr. Justice waits on mamma. Who next?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Springletop—Mr. and Mrs. Poppit. Hands across, don't you see?—that's all. Married people ought to dine with married people and entertain one another about their families."

"Much you know about the matter!

However, you're right for once," remarked Loo. "The fact is, Mr. Springletop and Mrs. Poppit do flirt so desperately whenever they get a chance that they not only entertain each other, but everybody else. Poor little Mr. Poppit! He does get so aggravated, and then drinks like a fish and shouts out questions across the table to Mr. Springletop, which he knows he can't answer, on purpose to make him shut up and look foolish."

"How many more?" demanded Lotty.

"Only three—all bachelors—Mr. Goldwin, Mr. Worsley, and Mr. Petersfeld."

"Well?"

"Just what we want," rejoined Linda. "You shall have Mr. Goldwin, Lotty, my dear, because he's a beautiful dark dandy with diamond studs and an eyeglass, and all that sort of thing: much too

good for small people like me ; and Loo shall have Mr. Worsley, because, though he's rather a muff, he's going to be Vice-Chancellor or something, some day, papa says. And I'll dine with Mr. Petersfeld, because there's nobody else left. Nothing could be more capital."

Naturally enough this cool appropriation of the new guest, about whom a great deal of curiosity, to say the least of it, existed, was not received with acclamation by the elder sisters.

"You are quite welcome to Mr. Petersfeld, Linda," observed Lotty in a freezing voice.

"Quite," added Loo, with a slight toss of her head. "We wouldn't stand in your way upon any account."

"Why, what nonsense ! You know perfectly well that there's no choosing in the

matter. He's the youngest of the three and can't well be sent down before them, and I'm the youngest of you, so we must go together—hey?"

To this unsatisfactory truth the sisters could only reply by a mitigated, young-lady-like snort.

"I can't conceive what you mean, either of you," resumed Linda, almost out of patience. "You seem to want a quarrel, and to expect me to begin."

"I wish you were back in the school-room!" broke out Loo, impetuously. "It's too bad that such a chit as you should always interfere with arrangements. Mamma should get a great big school-boy with short trousers and a silver watch for *your* partner. Then you wouldn't make a fool of yourself, and of us into the bargain."

"I'm afraid what Charley Lavender said

of you at his club—yes, up in the smoking-room, before goodness knows how many men—is only too true,” murmured Lotty. “I wish you were aware, Linda, of what men *do* say of girls who come downstairs before they know the way of the world, or what’s what in society.”

“Perhaps Mr. Petersfeld likes that sort of thing,” continued Loo. “I hear he is eccentric. Isn’t he to have ever so many thousand a year, and to be a baronet some day, when somebody dies?”

“Don’t ask me,” growled Lotty. “I know nothing whatever about Mr. Petersfeld. Linda has it all pat, I’ll be bound.”

To this petulant explosion of ultra-sisterly jealousy Linda disdained a corresponding reply. To place an angry person plainly in the wrong is to pull the bone from a snarling dog. He must have some-

thing to worry, and ten to one if you interfere with his occupation as it stands, you will divert it with very little advantage to yourself. I don't mean to say that she was not considerably annoyed at the moment; but, however that may have been, she came down upon her sisters with a brilliant flank movement, which disconcerted them both.

"Come!" she said, her sunny little face lighting up, as if with some delightful idea. "I couldn't be as old as Lotty, of course, if I tried; and as to being as wise as you, Leo, my dear, that's still more out of the question. However, I beg to decline the school-boy, and to offer you both a bet if you only dare to take it."

"A bet!" exclaimed Lotty, contemptuously.

"Certainly. Mr. Petersfeld, you'll observe, is none of my choice. Moreover, I have

never set eyes upon him in my life. Now, we are engaged to go to the Zoological Gardens on Saturday with those dreadful country cousins, the whole clan of the Bunnytails—are we not?”

“Dear me, I had forgotten it, I declare,” replied Loo. “Why on earth we need be so frightfully civil to them every time they think proper to come to town, passes my comprehension altogether!”

“My gracious, Loo, don’t you know better than that? Members of Parliament, like papa, must take notice of their constituents, even when they aren’t their own brothers-in-law, as Mr. Bunnytail is. Why, papa would have been turned out last election, if it hadn’t been for Mr. Bunnytail and his friends, the farmers. If he and aunt were ten times as dreadful, they’d have to be rubbed the right way. But no matr-

ter for that. We are going to the Zoological Gardens, are we not?"

"I suppose we are. Worse luck to us. I do hate dromedaries and all that sort of thing like poison."

"Never mind the dromedaries. Listen to me. I bet you each a pair of new gloves that Mr. Petersfeld shall not only talk to me all the evening after dinner, but that he shall appear at the Zoological Gardens next day, and talk to me, and me alone, and follow me about all the afternoon like a regular showman. There now! Say 'done,' if you dare!"

"Well, you are too dreadful, Linda!" gasped Lotty. "Do you mean to say that you'll actually ask him to come sweet-hearting, like a housemaid? I do hope to goodness gracious he's a modest man, or got some rag of decency left him, that's all!"

"Fiddlestick, Charlotte! I give you my honour I will never even allude to the gardens, if either of you will simply let him know we are going. Now, there's a fair wager. You have called me all sorts of contemptuous names. Now I defy you both! Why don't you say 'done?' "

"Who's to be umpire?" demanded Lotty, with a supercilious air. "Are we to believe our own eyes, or only what you may please to tell us?"

"Judge for yourselves, of course!" replied Linda. "What do you suppose I should care for victory, if I didn't make you acknowledge your defeat?"

"Done with you," said Loo, desperately. "A pair of new gloves at three-and-six."

"Done!" echoed Lotty, who didn't see exactly what else to say, though she had uncomfortable misgivings as to the result.

"I'm utterly ashamed of the whole thing, Linda; but if wilful will, why wilful must. I only hope you'll get a right down, good lesson, without disgracing anybody besides yourself. Of course Mr. Petersfeld may be fool enough for anything, for all we know."

"Part of my chance!" retorted Linda laughing. "Recollect, my number is six-and-a-quarter, and my favourite colour bright chocolate. Recollect, also, that I leave it to your honour to tell fairly about the Zoo. I promise not to say a word myself."

CHAPTER VII.

It was not until four o'clock of the very day of the Buttermere dinner, that Petersfeld made his appearance at chambers, on his way from the terminus at London Bridge. I had naturally begun to feel not a little uneasy at his absence, for it is no joke to have forged a man's acceptance to a note of invitation, and to be obliged to confess the fact with shame, at the last moment, to a justly irritated and disappointed hostess.

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His arrival, therefore, was a welcome relief, although I was too much engaged at the moment to listen to the story of his adventures. Accordingly, he soon took his departure, promising to appear in Harley Street at seven punctually, and engaging me on the other hand to accompany him, after dinner, to the Albany, and hear all he had to tell, even if we gave the whole night to it.

Three facts, indeed, were all that I had time to gather during our short interview. First: that he had actually ascertained the name and late abode of the missing young lady, beyond all possibility of mistake. Secondly: that—like the detectives themselves—he had signally failed in discovering any clue whatever to her actual whereabouts. Lastly: that he had arrived at the irrepressible and uncomfortable misgiving,

that all was not as it should be upon the part of her friends—to use his own words, that there was foul play somewhere.

This belief, indeed, had worked itself so deeply into his mind, that the idea of a mere exciting chase, brilliant with adventure, and perhaps closing in romance, was no longer—as I could easily perceive—the principal motive for continued exertion.

Lightly as the pursuit had been taken up, it might as lightly have been abandoned, but for a grave change in the aspect under which he had begun to view it. Wondering even to himself at the blind and headlong manner in which he had rushed recklessly into what was—in the outset, certainly—no business of his, a gradual conviction had possessed his mind, that by a sort of providential chance, he had blundered into an affair in which he was, as it were, a predes-

timed actor, with a duty and a responsibility deservedly cast upon his hands.

Is there anything in this to smile at? Did you yourself, reader of these pages, never encounter some sudden, some unexpected occasion, upon which you might have made yourself the instrument of untold good, had you only chosen to interfere? I use the word 'interfere' advisedly, for in its base and secondary sense, it has probably furnished as much excuse for plain neglect of duty, as any in the English language. Was it not, if you recollect, one day when you passed on, happy to be able to assure yourself that the matter was no business of yours? No? Then you are fortunate, indeed. I have: and the recollection has embittered many a moment since. It was an opportunity offered me, a chance of service, the reward of which was, assuredly,

not in this world. But I passed on, with the dreadful, the irrevocable truth upon my lips, that the affair was no business of mine.

However, since nothing can be more foreign to my purpose than to regale my reader with melo-dramatic extravagance, I may at once say that Petersfeld was altogether wrong in his suspicion that anything like foul play had occurred in the present instance. That, in his hot inexperience, he may have had strong apparent reason for coming to the conclusion which he did, is quite possible, but another thing altogether, as in due time will appear. Meanwhile, it may be as well not to be late for dinner.

As I happened to be the first arrival in Harley Street that evening, I had not only the pleasure of being very kindly welcomed by the family present, but of entertaining

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myself with watching other people as they entered the room. Those who study character, should always avail themselves of such an opportunity, where a great deal that is suggestive may often be picked up in a few moments.

The fact is, that although the entering a drawing-room before dinner is a feat which many people perform several times in the course of each week of their lives, yet such are the conditions of complete civilisation, that between the clatter and clang at the hall-door, announcing the first arrival, and the welcome apparition at the drawing-room door of an obsequious personage in black, shortly after the arrival of the last, there is generally an embarrassing interval, which a recent Chinese Ambassador used to rejoice in, as the only portion of the day during which he found himself reminded of the

ineffable proprieties of his own Flowery Land.

It is a *mauvais quart d'heure*, during which nobody appears to be naturally alive —when wits are shy and beauties dull, and when middle-aged gentlemen, who in ten minutes' time are going to be jolly for the rest of the evening, talk grievous platitudes with a miserable show of being quite serious, and positively amused in good earnest.

And, as each successive visitor alights within the spell-bound circle, it is with such reckless resignation to the exigency of the moment, that to guess from first appearances what he or she may be like in more lucid intervals, or may probably turn out after a short course of soup and sherry, presents a problem well worthy the attention of any unoccupied philosopher.

Thus Mr. and Mrs. Poppit sidled in first;

with a conscious simper, as if they had just been privately married in the cloak-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Springletop came next, with radiant air and ambling steps, looking as people are bound to look upon such occasions, in tip-top spirits, and full of the pleasantest anticipations imaginable.

Then arrived Mr. Justice Brindlebun and his lady, smiling like a well-to-do couple in the farming line ; the former with just a touch of the hippopotamus in plain clothes, but as jovial and easy an old gentleman as one would wish to meet.

Immediately afterwards, Mr. Goldwin sparkled in, all wristband, studs, and eye glass, with his flat hat under his arm, and pulling off his white gloves, to all appearance just landed from some magnificent planet, and bewildered in plain wax-candle-light.

Last of all came Petersfeld, elaborately got up certainly, but as easy and unembarrassed as if strolling into our own chambers before breakfast. He was happily unaware of the intense interest which his appearance created in the minds of the three partners respectively; and, after gracefully making his salutations to host and hostess, allowed himself as easily to be introduced to Linda, as the young lady whom he was to take down to dinner.

Preoccupied as he was with other thoughts, it was not in nature that he should be indifferent to her pretty face and figure, lustrous with youth and health. Whether the knowledge that those snowy muslin flounces had been arranged for his especial benefit—that those glossy sheaves of auburn hair had been parted and smoothed with such elaborate attention for the same

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purpose, and that even the tiny locket which danced like a star upon her dainty bosom, had been carefully selected to flash fascination upon him alone, would have made any difference, is perhaps an awkward question. And what might have been the result of a suspicion that his own performance that evening had been betted upon as freely by the young lady herself as that of a colt at Newmarket, is a speculation better left alone.

Buttermere himself moved about the room a perfect picture of happiness and hospitality. The old boy enjoyed nothing in the world, out of court, so much as these snug little dinners. Fourteen was his regular number, partly because it just suited the dimensions of his modest dining-room, partly because it was one of the numbers which admit of such an arrangement as seats a lady on each

side of her host, a gentleman on either side of his hostess, with alternate lady and gentleman down both sides of the table. And upon this latter point Mr. Buttermere was minutely particular—a place for everybody, and everybody in his or her place—being in his opinion one of the many secrets of success in one of the most arduous responsibilities which can be undertaken by a citizen of the world.

Another secret—the happy selection and combination of one's guests—he flattered himself he had not overlooked upon the present occasion. In short, it was with feelings of more than every-day complacency that, having carefully counted his visitors backwards and forwards, he turned to Mrs. Buttermere with the stereotyped smile and expression customary in such cases, and meekly said :—“I think I may ring for

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dinner, may I not? We seem to be all here."

O no, Mr. Buttermere, O no. . Not by any manner of means. You may count your company and ring your bell; but we are not all here. Not all!

For there arose a sound of conversation upon the staircase, at first simply mysterious and irregular; then, louder and more energetic, as if somebody was being punished. And then the drawing-room door was suddenly flung open, and a vague voice announced—"Mr. and Mrs. Bunnytail!" and was gone.

It was the transaction of a moment. So are many of the casualties of life.

An enormous woman, followed by a short sunburnt, stubble-headed man, sailed steadily across the room, like a frigate with prize in tow. And such a cruiser! She really might have been shown for money at the town-

fair, and described to the sound of the drum. You never saw such a fat, florid face, cascaded on either side with floods of golden ringlets, shiny sleek. You never saw such magnificent fat arms, such a breadth of bosom, such girth of waist, and exuberant, well-developed weight. If the tough little gentleman astern had anything to do with it—I mean in the professional administration of oatcake, swedes and mangold wurzel, or any better adapted esculent, I should like to walk with him through his home farm, and pat and pinch the remainder of his stock. He ought to have won the medal of every known society whose aim it is to encourage unwary beasts in over-eating themselves, and disfigure our shops at Christmastide with bloated and unwieldy carcasses, only fit to be devoured in darkness, amid the bellowing of all the giants.

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But, if Mrs. Bunnytail's appearance was commanding, her attire, when you had leisure to consider it, was quite as worthy of wonder.

I suppose it was, in point of fact, the dream of some Arcadian *modiste*, inspired by one of the plates in a French Fashion-book. Of course, as a bachelor, my connoisseurship in such matters will be taken for what it is worth. I only recollect that she seemed to set us all in a blaze with a crimson satin gown glittering with bugle lace, whilst her neck and arms, which rivalled the dress in point of complexion, were festooned with outrageous jewellery, producing a result which I think she would like me to describe as "gorgeous."

Moreover, notwithstanding her ample circumference, she positively rolled top-heavy under the frightful weight of flowers, lace:

and feather stacked upon her head. It looked, I declare, as if some insane tropical bird had built its nest upon that stupendous summit—indeed it may have been hatching there at the moment, for aught I know to the contrary.

“ Well, sister Carlo !” she exclaimed, steering straight for Mrs. Buttermere, “ you know you said you hoped we’d dine with you often, as long as we could stay in London ; and so here we are, you see, though goodness knows if I’d only known who you’d got here, I wouldn’t have come ;—anyhow I wouldn’t have brought Bunnyt看. And now I do hope and trust we bring no inconvenience with us ; though that’s like talking about spilt milk, isn’t it, because really, what between the cat and the parlour-maid, as to keeping anything at our lodgings, the thing’s impossible, and to go

straight back again, would be just going to bed at once; and as you recommended the apartments, it makes finding fault more unpleasant than ever, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Buttermere had been in the act of rising from her chair at the moment of this unparalleled intrusion. Her first impulse was to sink back again and faint away dead. Her second, an injudicious one, to exclaim, with a dreadful face, "who are you?" and command that the Bunnytails should be forthwith hustled into the street as a couple of sturdy impostors. But, alas, the indignant volubility with which Mrs. Bunneytail would only too clearly proclaim her identity, was matter of very plain prophecy; and terror held her dumb.

Could a word have consigned Mrs. Bunneytail and her consort to the uttermost part of the Red Sea, or landed them both within

the crater of Cotopaxi, I suspect the worthy couple would have vanished upon their travels in less time than it takes me to write this line. What would the Brindlebuns think?—what would the Poppits say?—how should she ever look the Springletops in the face again? And as to Petersfeld, oh, why had he ever been ‘brought home’ on that horrible night?

“I thought you were going to the theatre this evening!” she gasped at last. “O, why didn’t you go!”

“Why that’s true enough,” retorted the great sister, nothing abashed. “We were going, sure alive, and meant to go, only Bunnytail, don’t you see, has a wonderful knack of asking questions; so he asks and asks, and at last he makes out that these performers, or whatever you call them, don’t finish up till some outlandish time to-mor-

row, anyhow long after twelve o'clock to-night; and if Bunnytail ain't in bed before the clock strikes ten, why he goes to roost wherever he is, and snorts like his own bull. So, don't you see, the theatre was no place for us; and we had, as it were, to cast about how to spend a companionable evening; and, as luck would have it, I says to him, says I, Law, Bunnytail, good man, why not spend it with sister Carlo? Let's dress up at once——"

"O, my goodness!" shuddered poor Mrs. Buttermere, on the verge of hysterics, "Charlotte's my name, if you'd only leave it alone! Couldn't you go down-stairs—or up-stairs—or do anything but stand there?"

Lucky it was that Mr. Buttermere had exactly the tact and aplomb necessary for encountering the most desperate emer-

gency. Had he been in Court, before the Chancellor himself, he could not have shown more conspicuous generalship and self-possession.

“My dear Mrs. Bunnytail, say no more. We are delighted to see you. How are you, Bunnytail! Just the man we wanted to fill our only spare place.” And in the twinkling of an eye the unlucky couple were introduced all round. Petersfeld and Linda, as the junior couple, were begged in a whisper, the one to escort Mrs. Bunnytail, the other to pass to dinner under Mr. Bunnytail’s wing—then to assume their proper places, side by side, as if nothing had happened, leaving their morganatic partners to edge in where they could.

And so, in five minutes’ time we found ourselves upon the staircase, rather the better, if anything, for recent troubles,

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during which Lotty had looked on like a vestal insulted at the altar, Loo with the more intolerant feelings of a maiden of this world, while Linda laughed outright.

CHAPTER VIII.

“WELL,” exclaimed Mrs. Bunnytail, cramming herself into a chair next to Petersfeld, who had Linda on his left, “this is comfortable indeed, and as smart as you please! You live in London, sir, I daresay, and living and lodging comes all natural. But just you come up from the country as we do. You’d wish yourself back again often enough. But law!” continued the lady, glancing round at the *épergnes*, cut glass, spun-sugar and hot-house flowers, “what’s the meaning of all this? It looks more like a dessert than a dinner, to my

mind. We're never going to dine backwards, are we? Not that I mind, only Bunnetail's got a short temper, and if he doesn't soon get his tooth into something wholesome, he won't like it, I know. Lucky for him he would step in for a snack this afternoon at the 'Six Bells.' I dare say you know it well, sir. A public-house with a blue door and plate-glass window, just off Charing Cross. It reminded him, don't you see, of the old sign where he takes his dinner market days. La! I do declare here's a dish of hot broth, and I never saw it come; and yes, my man, I'll take a glass of wine, and it's just what I was wanting, thank you."

But it is high time to put a padlock at once upon Mrs. Bunnetail's tongue. In spite of her voluble conversation, to which Petersfeld listened apparently with the most

winning interest and attention, Linda was not neglected ; neither did she forget to improve the shining hour to the very best of her ability, which was indeed far above the average.

I need hardly say that the only too palpable manner in which she was rapidly coming over Petersfeld was watched by her sisters with unmitigated displeasure. Lotty pretended to herself that she was scandalized, when in fact only jealous ; while Loo's exasperation proceeded to the extent of seriously interfering with her dinner. They were only too delighted at the incessant interruptions of Mrs. Bunnytail, whose running commentary upon the whole entertainment, intermixed with her experience of life in London, as contrasted with housekeeping in the country, were loudly audible across the table.

It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose that Linda was trusting to her own personal attractions, or pretty flow of small-talk, alone, to win the chocolate gloves, and drive her sisters in confusion from their own ground. Quite the contrary. She had a famous piece of artillery in reserve, which she hesitated to let off *à propos* to nothing, but which nevertheless lay primed and loaded, and which, come what might, must be discharged, at all hazards, before the ladies left the table. Luckily, almost at the last moment, she was spared the trouble of finding an excuse for the shot.

“By the way, Buttermere,” suddenly exclaimed Mr. Justice Brindlebun in his sonorous voice, “have you ever, among your many clients, chanced to learn the meaning of that strange advertisement in the *Times*,

the other day? Five hundred pounds reward, if you recollect, offered for the recovery of a lovely and mysterious damsel, who seems to have walked off with her pockets full of gold and silver."

"No, indeed I have not, Sir John," replied Buttermere, from the lower end of the table. "There's a romance of real life, depend upon it, at the bottom of that story. It was talked about a good deal when the notice first appeared, and the singular thing is, that nobody I ever met, even pretended to know anything about it. Never yet heard a bit of scandal discussed at the club, when somebody or other didn't say he only wished he was at liberty to tell all he knew."

"She ought to be caught, I should say," observed Mr. Goldwin, in the tone of one accustomed to deliver weighty remarks *ex*

cathedrd :—"caught" of course, if only to satisfy the public, whose curiosity she has so unfeelingly tantalised. Wonder if they'll tell us, if they do catch her. Very likely not, I should say. Wonder where she is now?"

"Last seen near the London Tavern, hailing a Hansom," said Mr. Springletop. "Poppit jumped in after her."

"What, my husband!" exclaimed Mrs. Poppit, with a little affected scream.

"It's a dreadful business, in my opinion," remarked Mrs. Springletop. "Only to think of having one's face and dress paraded in all the newspapers, with a reward for one's conviction, as if one was going to be removed in the van."

Mrs. Springletop's experience in criminal law having been chiefly derived from a perusal of the daily police report, suggested

this as the final doom of the wicked; in England, at all events.

"I'm not so sure that a month in the House of Correction would be at all a bad lesson for her," observed Mrs. Buttermere, by way of promptly discountenancing any such escapade as matter for imitation in her own family.

"What's all this? For goodness sake somebody tell me what we're all talking about!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunntail.

"Isn't it odd, Mr. Petersfeld," remarked Linda, in a low tone, and with the most captivating air of innocent confidence—"isn't it odd that I should know more of this mysterious affair than all these good people put together?"

"You!" exclaimed Petersfeld, with a start of astonishment. "Is it possible?"

"Pray—pray, Mr. Petersfeld, don't jump

again like that, or we shall have every one looking at us. Yes. It is not only possible, but perfectly true."

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Paul, "but really if you had told me that the young lady was under the table at this moment, I should scarcely have been more surprised. Will you tell me her name?"

"Not for five hundred pounds!" replied Linda, with a playful shake of her head. "I assure you, Mr. Petersfeld, I can keep a secret. How can her name have any possible interest for you, unless as a mere point of curiosity?"

"It happens, however, that I am very much interested in the case," returned Petersfeld, gravely. "As to her name, I assure you I know that as well as you."

"O no—no! Else why did you ask me? You are not serious, I am quite sure. Tell

me the name, and I shall begin to believe you."

For an instant, the ungracious suspicion flashed across Petersfeld's mind that his pretty companion was making fun of him. She might possibly have heard of his late proceedings, and thought it fair sport enough to get a 'rise' out of him after dinner. So he replied to the challenge by a shake of his own head, implying that the conversation had come to an end so far as he was concerned.

"You doubt my word: I see that," persisted Linda, pretending to look vexed. "I am not suspicious myself, and I do not choose to be suspected by others. I will be the first to tell. Only there's my sister looking as hard at us as if we were talking high treason. You can speak on your fingers? Well, watch mine—quite promis-

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cuous, you know—whilst I speak to Mr. Worsley across the table.

Of course, in her simple artlessness, Linda knew of no better way than this to convey an important piece of information. Of course she hadn't the slightest idea that those little nimble fingers could be doing any other business than passing it silently and secretly to her attentive neighbour. Of course, if the pretty twinkling telegraph, working with such bewitching neatness, should make him long to snatch and work it himself, and keep it for his own private use all the rest of his life, it would be an exceedingly odd result; but no affair of hers. It was obviously a quiet careful way of imparting a secret, and adopted accordingly.

Quick as thought, a christian, then a surname, were spelt out. Then the name of a

country house. Then the little fairy hands clapped thrice, as if in the glee of childish triumph—folded themselves pleasantly together, and were still.

Nobody was a bit the wiser; except, indeed, Mrs. Bunnytall, who, conceiving at once the sensible idea that this might be the way in which town-bred young ladies explained the state of their feelings to favoured young gentlemen, was much edified by the performance. Not being an adept at the manual alphabet, the various symbols, as she considered them, were naturally perplexing; although, as to the meaning of one or two of them, she felt there could be no possible mistake.

Paul sat thunderstruck. It was evident that Linda knew all. "May I ask you one more question," he began, breathless and confused at this astounding revelation.

“Not now. Look ! Mamma’s signalling to Lady Brindlebun, and can’t catch her eye. We shall be going upstairs in one minute. Another time.”

“I am not asking out of mere curiosity.”

“No, no, I dare say not. But you should have asked sooner. See, we are going ; I can tell you no more now.”

And in that rustling sweep of silk and muslin with which ladies disappear from a dining-room, was Linda borne away.

I have not thought it worth while to say much of Mr. Bunnyt看’s behaviour during dinner, because, in point of fact, beyond being very quiet and clumsy, I can scarcely say that he behaved at all. Fishes, I believe, are proverbially supposed to drink very often and speak very seldom, which was precisely the case with my neighbour. However, just after the departure of the

ladies, and almost before Buttermere had assumed his position at the head of the table, he suddenly exclaimed, after a thump of his fist, which set every wine-glass jingling :—

“She should ha’ come to Bunnyt看 Bottom !”

“Hey—who should have come?” exclaimed the judge, looking down the table, his rosy face on the *qui vive* for a joke. “Are you speaking of the young lady, Mr. Bunnytail?”

“Aye, my lord,” returned the farmer slowly. “She should have come to Bunnyt看 Bottom. She would have been safe there. Safe enough. My house is my castle.”

“To be sure! She wouldn’t get away again in a hurry—eh? Well, now, if she came to me, I should take much the same

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view. I should think twice before I parted with her for five hundred pounds. I think I'd keep her—economically, of course—and stand out for the thousand."

"Saving your presence, my lord," replied Bunnytail, upon whose elocution a liberal bottle of port had bestowed an almost judicial solemnity, "if I could harbour such a thought—in the way, mind you, of putting it in act—I should deserve nothing better than to be tossed by my own bull. Nothing I should hate more, you understand; but I'd take it, if I so deserved it, like a cheerful man."

"Just so," rejoined Brindlebun, mischievously, "I see exactly what you mean. If you had the young lady, and I came to molest her, you'd run your bull, and let him carry the answer. That's it, I think."

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Bunnytail. "I'd

give a pound, any time, to see Solomon do it! There'd be no mistaking what he'd got to say, would there? So that's law, my lord?"

"Come, come, Mr. Bunnytail! I'm not going to be let in for a legal opinion after dinner; especially where I'm a party concerned. It would be quite enough for me, I take it, if it turned out to be a fact."

"Fact!" retorted the farmer, over whose faculties the predestined hour of roost was rapidly stealing. "Aye, fact. I'm a jury-man of twenty years standing and more—I am. Many's the judge I've seen sitting penned up like a pig with a medal, and not a word to say for himself, till we gentlemen made it convenient to step back into court and tell him what o'clock it was by the fact. Facts are facts, sir. And if ever there was a fact with a tail and pair of

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horns to it, that fact is my bull, Solomon."

"What a pity it is Mr. Bunnytail," suggested Petersfeld, whose excitement during this desultory conversation had become unendurable, and who felt that he must explode in unexpected confession, if he kept silence a moment longer. "What a pity it is that this forlorn young woman can't be made aware of your kind intentions. If we could only contrive to let her know that there was one spot, at least, in England where peace and protection awaited her, and that that one spot was Bunnytail Bottom—what glorious news to carry!"

"Carry it yourself, young gentleman," replied Bunnytail, whose conversational faculties were in process of rapid eclipse. "Carry it yourself, if it's no trouble, and say I sent it. Just you bring her there,

any time between milking in the morning and half-past nine at night, and see whether Laban Bunnyt看ail isn't as good as his word! Let the Beadles come. Let anybody come. The more the better, I say. To be sure. The more the better. While she wants to stay she stays. When she wants to go she goes. And if any man would lay his finger upon her, within my gates, except in the way of kindness, Laban Bunnytail will know the reason why. That's all I shall say."

Nothing could have been truer than the last remark; for Mr. Bunnytail thereupon fell immediately into a snoring sleep from which nothing short of violence could have aroused him. And a few slight attempts in that direction, made as we quitted the dining-room, having been received with unmeasured obloquy, there was nothing for

it but to leave him in his chair, with orders to the servants upon no account whatever to disturb him.

So the latter, in clearing the table, laughed as gently as possible, and not liking to leave their master's guest entirely in the dark, compromised matters by lighting a flat-candlestick and placing it reverently before him.

And there Mr. Bunnytail was found, an hour later, by his buxom partner; his chin buried in his waistcoat, and his hands folded complacently across his stomach—looking like a weather-beaten Chinese Joss, whom some good-natured worshipper had charitably provided with a night-light.

That he ever troubled his head again, without reason, about his rambling challenge to Petersfeld is extremely unlikely. Nevertheless, as we have already seen, these

general invitations do sometimes lead to unexpected results, and I would not have you too hastily dismiss Mr. Bunnytail from recollection, at the conclusion of the present chapter.

All Petersfeld's attempts, and they proceeded certainly to the very outmost borders of discretion, to get any further confidence that evening out of Linda, were perfectly futile. A young lady of the house has her own proper duties to attend to ; and if she has no spare time to devote to comparing notes with an inquisitive gentleman, why so much the worse for him. Without in the least evading Petersfeld, she easily let him feel that, if he wanted further information, he must ask for it at the proper time, which unquestionably was not then. And so, after having been twice discomfited—once at the tea-table, and afterwards beside the piano,

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there was no help for it but to take leave like other people.

A few moments found us bowling down Bond Street, in a Hansom, on our way to his rooms in the Albany.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT dim and jealously-guarded "No Thoroughfare," which runs from Vigo Street to Piccadilly, almost side by side with the Burlington Arcade, and which we now know as the Albany, was a strawberry garden a hundred years ago. It belonged to the mansion in Piccadilly which it now tunnels, then the residence of His Royal Highness the Duke of York, whose second title has since given a name to the whole concern. However, the last strawberry was picked before any of us were born or thought of; and it is now simply a

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covered avenue, with a range of bachelor apartments on either side ; among the quietest and most severely fashionable in all London.

Paul's sitting-room was a large, low, heavily-wainscotted apartment, upon the ground floor. The chambers had been in his family for an immense number of years, cherished and preserved as forming a sort of *pied à terre* in the great metropolis. The stiff, black, oaken furniture dated from the day of an equally stiff grandpapa, whose portrait surmounted the mantel-piece. The more modern decorations were Paul's own. And nobody knew his own taste more clearly or gratified it more cleverly than he. Well do I recollect the day when he first came up to Trinity, and I assisted him in making the usual bargain with the college upholsterer.

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"Print or two, sir, wouldn't look amiss over that chiffonier. Glass for chimney-piece of course you'll want. Bracket for figure here, sir, would make all the difference. Clock — weather glass — mahogany book-case. Got a great selection if you'd only call in All Saint's Passage," said the tradesman. "Make your room look very nice."

"Just you knock half a hundred brass-headed hooks into the wall, right and left," replied Petersfeld, "and come and see me to-morrow. Then you'll know what a nice room's like!"

I hope the upholsterer came in the morning, for the result was a thing to be noticed. There was not one hook too many. Foils, boxing-gloves, pipes, daggers, bats, pistols, antlers, alpenstocks, whips, bugles, fox-brushes, skates, fishing-rods, guns, goff-

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sticks, Indian clubs, and every conceivable article of similar nature covered the walls in lavish profusion, producing at once, as we all confessed, the most stunning room in College.

Most of these effective decorations had accompanied their master to the Albany, where, with many important additions, they had been arranged with considerable taste. The stuffed animals alone were worth a visit; but in point of fact the connoisseur in anything, from suits of solid armour down to glowing French ballet scenes (suggesting the motto of our most noble order of knighthood) need not have gone away disappointed. Last, but not least, upon the round table in the middle of the room, sparkled the central glory of the place, a fifty guinea cup of massive silver, fairly won at Wimbledon from a phalanx of nearly one hundred competitors.

To stir the fire—light candles, and produce every proper adjunct of midnight hospitality was the work of a minute. I say ‘midnight’ because I had promised Petersfeld to hear his whole story out before leaving; as I was obliged to start on the morrow for a distant country château, where I had engaged to spend my Easter vacation. And though my own counsel and experience may not have been very valuable, I knew how intensely he would dislike the being left to stumble on in his adventure as best he might, without having any intimate friend in the secret, with whom he could correspond as to his movements, or consult in a difficulty.

Besides, nothing would have satisfied him short of taking my opinion as to all that he had already heard, done and seen; and, as that could not be learned without

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listening, I resolved to give audience patiently, and with good grace.

So, seating ourselves in two huge fauteuils, on either side of the comfortably blazing hearth, Paul began the story of his adventures, which was to the following effect :—

We left him, it may be recollected, in a corner of his club library, bent upon following out Kinghorn's canny suggestion, that by searching a file of the *Times* extending over the preceding month or so, he might probably hit upon something which would afford a clue for further proceedings.

Neither was he disappointed : at least something which seemed not exactly promising, but still possibly to the purpose, soon presented itself. After turning the leaves for some time steadily backwards, and wading through a lamentable list of missing

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husbands, wives, sons, daughters, keys, poodle-dogs, and purses, enough to convince him that we English are among the most reckless and untrustworthy people alive, his eye fell at last upon the following advertisement. It was dated the 17th of April—rather more than a fortnight back.

“£150 REWARD! Lost, on Wednesday last, supposed upon or near the high road between St. Mark's-on-the-Sea and Riverwood, a **RED MOROCCO POCKET-BOOK**, containing, among other papers, three Bank of England notes for £1000 each, numbered and dated as below. The said notes are stopped at the Bank of England. Whoever will bring these notes, or any of them to the Branch Bank, St. Mark's-on-the-Sea, or give information leading to their recovery, either at that place, or to Serjeant Wilkinson, Detective Department, Great Scotland Yard, London, shall receive the above reward, or a proportionate part thereof. Bankers and others are cautioned not to take or exchange the above notes. April 17th.

[Dates and Numbers.]”

Now this advertisement accorded precisely in point of time with the date at which, according to Mr. Bloss, the disappearance of

the young lady had taken place. It was, besides, the only advertisement, within some weeks either way, referring to the loss of any sum of money at all worth mentioning. Moreover, towards the conclusion, so at least Paul fancied, it bore some resemblance, in point of style, to the notice which had appeared that morning ; and although there was nothing but the very vaguest of conjecture to connect it in the slightest degree with the object of his search, to neglect it altogether was to throw away his only apparent chance. For, after devoting a full hour to the investigation, there was no appeal to be found of any sort or kind which could reasonably be supposed to have emanated from the friends of the lost young lady, or to have anything to do with the matter. Kinghorn had been too sanguine there. However, nothing could be more

simple than to drop down to St. Mark's, and ascertain by whom the money had been lost. And with that information, it could hardly be difficult, supposing that a young lady answering the description in the *Times*, had disappeared from the neighbourhood about the same time, to ascertain the fact.

So at least reasoned Paul; who, like most beginners in these matters, fancied that anything in the world might be found out by dint of asking a sufficient number of questions. And with no more promising base than this to start upon, the next morning found him actually on the rail, steering direct for St. Mark's-on-the-Sea, which is within one hundred and fifty miles of London.

Without taking the trouble to assume any actual disguise, he adopted a well-worn tweed fishing suit, wide-awake hat, and leathern knapsack, which had done good

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mountain service, in the Tyrol and elsewhere, as best suited to the expedition. A mere pedestrian wanderer, geologically, botanically, architecturally, or otherwise harmlessly inclined, might, he imagined, loiter and pry a good deal about a country neighbourhood ; make all manner of acquaintances, and fish out no end of facts, without placing anybody upon their guard or good behaviour. And, thus appointed, he arrived, about two in the afternoon, at the railway station of St. Mark's-on-the-Sea.

St. Mark's is not one of those towns over which any traveller in search of the picturesque is likely to undergo ecstasy at first sight.

It is a slovenly, ill-built place enough ; of which the principal feature is a long straggling Main Street, with woful shops and a deserted air — a street which obviously

could hardly do better, if it would. What could be expected, for instance, from those deadly dry auctioneer offices, with faded plans and dreary catalogues, and old prospectuses of sales, which, if they ever took place at all, were over and done with half a year ago? What from that miserable chemist, with all last year's dead flies in his window? What from that fusty little haberdasher, the prices of whose goods, so painfully ticketed, all end with three farthings? What from that stranded Library, which, with useless belief in better things, stubbornly maintains that it 'circulates?'

However, in the absence of any personal quarrel with the town itself, one need not make more ado about its demerits, unless to observe that its very name indicates almost as loose a regard for truth, as its inhabitants have for appearances.

St. Mark's-on-the-Sea is not upon the sea at all ; in fact more than a mile distant ; although it possesses a pretty little suburb in that direction, called St. Mark's Bay, with a beach, a boat, a shrimp-catcher, a bathing machine, and a small hotel—an embryo watering-place — perhaps with a future of its own.

Of course Paul's first business was to look out for some place where he could put up, for a time at least, and relieve himself of his knapsack ; and, upon that point, it seemed as if he were likely to be saved all trouble in the way of selection. Boldly conspicuous in the Main Street stands "THE SARACEN, Commercial Hotel and Posting House ;" a great, red, hideous building, brandishing its pagan sign-board half across the way.

I don't know that I feel a more rooted

repugnance to the shameless blaze of a London gin palace, than I do to the very sight of these commercial caravansaries. There is a bagman, publican aspect about them which suggests the very antipodes of comfort in any decent sense of the word. I know perfectly well what I shall meet with inside, before I cross the threshold. I know that there will be a large lumber-littered hall, with a Bar at the end of it, containing a sharp young woman. I know that that hall will be hung with commercial and agricultural placards, three deep, containing information which at all events is not addressed to me. I know that the whole place will reek with spirits, sawdust, and stale smoke.

And as to the rooms, setting aside that uproarious parlour which the Children of Commerce call their own, and from which

the unsuspecting intruder is so promptly ejected, whither shall we turn? The sitting-rooms are all alike. Their very atmosphere is dust and rottenness. They have all horse-hair sofas, naked tables, hard chairs, mythical prints, and a cruet-stand. The windows of each are scratched over, in exactly the same manner, with the names of the several Samuels and Jemimas who, having adopted it as their unsavoury bower, invariably append the date of the transaction.

Try the club-room, where the farmers make evening hideous after every market day. There you will indeed find the death's-head without the feast. Perhaps the coffee-room is worst of all :—

“ Old boxes larded with the steam
Of thirty thousand dinners ;”

Stale newspapers, glass of tooth-picks, and beastly Directory. If you have a fancy

to ascend the shallow creaking staircase, you may mount alone. I know too well the mysteries of those airless bed-rooms and suspicious beds. And I own to even a more unconquerable distaste for the unclean chambermaid flitting aloof, than I have for her greedy, greasy, thankless brother, the waiter below.

Probably Petersfeld may have been much of my opinion. At all events, after having regarded the house distrustfully for a few moments, he crossed the street, and addressed a hostler-like man, who was loafing about the stable-yard.

"Is this the only hotel in the place, my man?"

"On'y one," replied the ostler, shortly.

"Don't it suit you?"

"Can't say till I've tried," returned Petersfeld; and as the question was one

which could only be decided by experiment, whilst the necessity for luncheon admitted of no delay, he entered the hostelry, and without committing himself to any longer stay, ordered bread and cheese and a jug of ale.

Even this rustic refreshment proved a failure. The bread was indifferent, the cheese rank, and the ale villainously hard. The waiter was an apathetic discontented youth, who took refuge from every inquiry in abstract ignorance. Petersfeld paid his half-crown, sat down by the fire to consider, and began by considering that he had made a fool of himself.

It was early times, certainly, to jump to such a conclusion. But there is a strange ebb in the flow of enterprise, which most of us have felt. We press on, for days together, perhaps, toward some coveted end,

with scarcely a suspicion of failure, or a cessation of impatience. Suddenly, from some utterly inadequate reason, a chill seems to sweep over our mind. We pause, and with a hesitation which almost amounts to indifference, wonder whether it is really worth while to try on. Something has set the whole matter before us in a changed light. Many a project has failed, simply because its undertaker had not sufficient faith or courage to pull against stream during this mysterious ebb, so that before the tide of resolution again began to flow, irrevocable time and opportunities had passed away for ever.

"I was a fool," muttered Paul to himself, with tremendous emphasis upon the noun substantive, "a fool to come down to this confounded place! I wouldn't dine and sleep in this den of thieves a week together

for a hundred pounds. As to getting anything out of these frightful boors, the idea's absurd. In fact, I should never have patience to attempt it. I wonder why on earth I came? By the bye, there's the Bank! I forgot that. Of course I'll go there at once, and ask if they know anything about it. If they don't, I'll go straight to the station, and get back to town by the next train; I can consider there whether there's anything more to be done; and at worst, it's only a day lost. I wonder what Worsley will say! However, I may succeed at the bank, and if I do, I'll take precious good care not to let him know how near I was shutting up."

And in this unpromising mood, Petersfeld proceeded at once to the branch bank, which he reached without difficulty, although he fancied that the grocer to

whom he applied for direction, equivocated strangely, and would have deceived him altogether if he could.

Now to *act*, in any important business, prematurely and without consideration, simply from an impulsive wish to do something, is, as we all know, one of the many recipes for failure. It is almost infallible—as I have noticed again and again.

“Nothing of importance,” observes Mr. Thomas Thrifty, in his valuable *Essay upon Early Rising*, “ought to be attempted in a hurry. But I except the catching of fleas.”

The branch bank at St. Mark’s-on-the-Sea, is a small, quiet concern, having the faded ill-to-do look, common to everything else in the place. Nobody was in the office, except two clerks, one of whom raised his eyes from the desk as Paul entered, and fixed them placidly upon him, as much as to say,

that unless time was no object, he was prepared to listen at once.

"I say!" began Paul, in his usual off-hand style, "about those £1000 notes that were lost in this neighbourhood some three weeks ago, and advertised in the *Times*. Would you mind telling me who lost them? Not been found yet, I suppose—have they?"

"Sir!" said the placid clerk, "If you have any information to communicate respecting these notes, you had better see our principal, Mr. Crackleton, within."

"Never mind your principal," returned Paul. "Can't you tell me what I want to know?"

"What name, sir?"

"As if my name had anything to do with it! I only want to know who lost these notes."

This was said with just as much *insou-*

ciance as if the question had been 'what's o'clock?' or 'how many miles to London?'

"I'll enquire, sir." And the clerk disappeared into an inner office.

"As if he didn't know!" thought Petersfeld. "I never, in all my life, saw a place like this. The whole thing seems like a nightmare. I almost believe it is."

"Now, sir!" exclaimed a little bald, plump, fidgety man, popping suddenly into the bank, and pouncing towards Petersfeld, like a spider upon a fly. "You've come about these notes, I understand. What about them? Now, sir! what?"

Anywhere else, the jack-in-the-box-like apparition of Mr. Crackleton might scarcely have been remarkable, but in this weird and sleepy place, it really seemed as if the excitability of a whole town had been bottled up in the testy little gentleman, who had

just drawn his own cork, and was enjoying the relief of a fizz over.

“Now, sir! Any information to give? Time’s time here, you know.”

“None whatever. I just called to ask a simple question, as your clerk has probably told you.”

“Oh, yes!—but, you know, I want to know what’s your reason for coming here asking simple questions. Now, sir! What do you want to know the name of the person who lost them for? You’re to come here, if you’ve anything to say—not to go to him. Didn’t you see that in the advertisement? Now, sir, from what my clerk tells me——”

“Your clerk be hanged!” retorted Petersfeld, incensed at this additional instance of the malignity of the St. Mark’s men. “It’ll do him good. What’s the use of kicking

up a shindy like this? If you don't like to answer my question, let it alone—and take the consequence!"

And so saying, Paul strode loftily out of the bank.

"Mr. Meeklin!" shouted the principal. "I don't like this. I don't at all. Now, sir! Keep that man in sight! Find Mr. Tobacco, and make him do his duty. I want to know who that man is, and where he goes. That man's got the notes, or else knows where they are. What else should he come here for, asking who they belong to, I should like to know? Only wish I could see my way to detaining that man! Jump, Mr. Meeklin, and tell Tobacco what I say."

And before Petersfeld had proceeded a couple of hundred yards down the street, he was, without being in the least aware of

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the fact, attended at a respectful distance, by a small prowling man in rusty black, who had been beckoned out of the 'Six Bells,' an adjacent public-house, and 'laid on' by the bank clerk.

If you ask me the why and wherefore of this inquisitorial proceeding, I am obliged to answer that I am in the unfortunate predicament of being only able to deal with one matter at a time. Luckily for you, the explanation is not distant, and you may follow my narrative without the uncomfortable misgiving that you have overlooked a point of importance.

In a peevish and despondent state of mind, Petersfeld took his way towards the railway station, laying the flattering unction to his soul that he had done the very utmost possible for one day, and that to pass the night in such a frowsy town, would be

simply Quixotic and absurd. As to giving up his adventure, that, as he was at some pains to assure himself, had never crossed his mind. He wanted time to reflect, before taking his next step. That was all.

Just as he was actually ascending the incline leading to the station, a whistle sounded, and with heavy, deliberate snorts, a train rolled slowly forth in the London direction.

"The up train, by all that's unlucky!" he exclaimed. "What an idiot I was not to look at the time-table. How long shall I have to wait?" continued he, addressing a porter, who was leisurely leaving the premises.

"No train up till 7.15," replied the man. "Run it a leetle too fine this time, haven't you, sir? That's the 3.10 train just gone."

"Good heavens! Then I'm in for four

hours more of it. Look here, porter! You know the place. How's a man to get through four hours at St. Mark's-on-the-Sea? What's to be seen? What's to be done? Got anything to suggest?"

"I know what I should do, if I was you," replied the porter, a jolly-looking, thick-set man, with a pleasant twinkle in his eye. "I should fust of all say to me— 'Here, porter; you look after my knapsack for me, and keep me a snug seat, with my back to the engine, by the 7.15 train.' Then, I should just step down to the 'Saracen' yonder, and order a reg'lar fust-rate blow-out. Steak, I should have, and baked potatoes, and fried onions, and a Welsh rabbit, and a pot of the double. I should order all that; and I wouldn't hurry myself over it neither. Then I should smoke my pipe—leastways my cigar, in

your case—don't you see, sir, till 6·45. Then I should have a go of gin-and-water warm, I should; and get tip-top comfortable. Then I should walk very slowly up here, like a nobleman, and look out for me. That's about what I should do."

"Not a bad idea either," said Petersfeld. "But, I say, is the 'Saracen' the only hotel in the place?"

"Well — there ain't no other — only publics. The 'Six Bells' ain't much of a place. Not unless you don't mind going a mile on—maybe a mile and a quarter—to St. Mark's Bay. There's a nice little house enough there—Mrs. Maldon's. Just on the sea, it is."

"Hang it; I've been so disgusted with the whole place that I never once thought of the sea! It's a decent house, is it?"

"Fust-rate, I should say. If you haven't

seen our Bay yet, you'd better go there. You've lots of time, sir, haven't you?"

"Rather too much of it. Well, I won't trouble you with my knapsack; because, if I like Mrs. Maldon's, I may possibly stay. However, that's for steak and onions, and nothing less, mind," concluded Paul, tossing him a half-crown and striding down the hill.

"Knew he was a gentleman!" chuckled the porter, spinning the coin high into the air. "Won't I just dine upon a dinner of my own ordering! at four o'clock too—like a director—that's all!"

CHAPTER X.

IT was a good half-hour's walk, from the Railway Station to St. Mark's Bay. Past that ill-favoured bank, the way led—past that scowling, unsavoury 'Saracen'—past rows of alms-houses for decayed shopkeepers, a likely enough complaint in St. Mark's, until at last it emerged in a shaded lane with overarching limes, whose twinkling canopy of transparent green seemed to dally rather than struggle with the westering light. A moment more, and the sea rose broad and blue, folding land-

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wards into a rounded nook, with low cliffs and spreading sands. This was St. Mark's Bay.

A few unpretending houses, sprinkled along the sloping down, alone broke the outline. Lower still, almost upon the shingle, a small irregular one-storied building, surrounded by a trim colonnade, announced itself as 'The St. Mark's Bay Hotel.'

A tiny lawn around was smoothly mown, and the nicely-tended flower-borders were already bright with colour, beneath the early break of lilac and laburnum; for St. Mark's Bay is fortunate in its aspect, and lights up before most places, under the fruitful influence of a strong May sun.

Altogether, there was such a clean, cosy, captivating air about the whole place, that Paul marched in at once, with a feeling of

thankfulness that he had been late for the train.

The good-looking, buxom landlady—Mrs. Maldon herself—at once appeared.

Had she any room?

To be sure, she had. Her season had hardly begun yet. There was only one family in the house. They had the best sitting-room. Nobody at all in the coffee-room at present. Would the gentleman like to be shown upstairs, and choose his apartment?

Upstairs all seemed as neat as below. Paul selected a bright, airy bedroom which overlooked the sea; so closely, indeed, that the windows were actually crusted with the salt spray of a late gale. For this, the smart little chambermaid apologized; observing, with a great deal of truth, that the sea was always a going on, and praising the

room generally, as the loveliest to look out of in the whole house.

Having ordered his dinner at six, for his late performance at the Saracen had been unsatisfactory, Paul strolled forth, a happier man, upon the wide sea-shore. His feelings had undergone a sudden change for the better. Nothing could be more pleasant than his present quarters, or better adapted as a basis for further operations. What those should be, he now set himself to work to consider.

It was a glorious afternoon; the sea winking and basking in the sun, as if with an amused recollection of its late misbehaviour; whilst thousands of birds, hawks, gulls, puffins, razor-bills, curlews and cormorants, whirled incessantly from the grey cliff-side, or swooped and flickered upon the surface of the water.

"Your servant, sir!" said a clear, cheery voice.

The speaker, a slight, good-looking man of forty, or thereabouts, had approached unperceived during the commencement of an interesting reverie, and bringing an Enfield rifle, which he carried at the trail, smartly to 'order,' touched his cap pleasantly.

"Yours," replied Paul, returning the salute. "Been shooting, I see. Couldn't have a nicer range than these sands, anywhere."

"No, nor better marks, neither. It's a wonderful coast for birds, this is."

"You don't seem to have brought home much of a bag either," observed Paul, rather ungraciously.

"Can't hit. That's it," said the stranger.

"Government rifle?"

"O yes. I'm one of the St. Mark's com-

pany—only we haven't got to musketry instruction yet. However, as my gun was served out, I sent up to town for a couple of hundred ball cartridges, and blaze away a bit, now and then, along the beach, just to get my hand in. You see we shall have our butt up, and begin target-work this summer; so I thought I'd just steal a march, as it were. I should like to come out strong in shooting."

"So would a good many of us. Then you're your own instructor for the present?"

"Can't do any harm, at all events. Can it?" replied the other, glancing affectionately at his rifle.

"Hum! That rather depends upon your style of teaching. Let's see you take a pot at that gull," said Petersfeld, pointing to a bird which had just settled, about a quarter of a mile from shore.

The stranger at once produced a ball-cartridge from his trowsers pocket, and went through his loading with the patient, clumsy accuracy of a man who has learned his lesson diligently out of a red book, but never seen it reduced to practice.

He then, with equal deliberation, twisted himself into a cruel and complicated posture, intended to represent the Hythe position; and, after taking murderously long aim at the unsuspecting bird, suddenly shut both eyes and discharged his rifle, like a suicide.

"Well done, you!" exclaimed Paul, as a just perceptible fleck of spray, far out to sea, announced the result of the performance. "If he'd been five hundred yards further off, and a mile or so to the right, you'd have had him, and no mistake. Now, if you wouldn't be offended by a hint or two, I'd engage to improve your shooting straight

away, so that, with three days' practice, you wouldn't know it again."

"Offended, indeed, sir! Would you really? I shall be grateful, I can tell you. Perhaps you'll take a shot yourself?"

"By all means," replied Paul, accepting the offered cartridge with a smile. "You are quite right to try what I can do, before you take a lesson. Now, look here."

It is a curious sensation, with which we see a piece of work over which we have been bungling and blundering for some time by the proverbially indifferent light of nature, quietly taken in hand by a real workman. It is vexatiously amusing to watch the rapid, natty way in which all our own difficulties are demolished or evaded, almost before they have time to show their stupid heads. In less time than it takes to write it, Paul's rifle was loaded and capped.

"Now," said he, "this is the way we kneel. Down upon your heel—so! Just you practise that for a week together, and you've a natural camp-stool for life, always handy wherever you go. Now, as to distance. Four hundred and fifty yards is what I give that bird. Look here! I put up my back-sight to five hundred, and, with foresight fine in the notch, I shan't be far wrong. Now I come to the present. Elbow-joint just over the knee; fore-arm well under the barrel. I'm not going to snatch at the trigger, as if I was letting off a shower-bath, I'm not. I'm just going to lay my head rather lazily over the butt. Then, just as I cover that bird, I shall quietly squeeze my trigger, as if it was a young lady's little finger. The gun won't hurt me. I know that. Keep your eye on the mark now."

"Crack!"

For an instant, it seemed as if the bird had exploded bodily, so sharply did a light feathery puff glance in the sunshine, apparently exactly where she floated. Fortunately for herself and her friends, however, she arose uninjured, and flew hastily away, lest the inconsiderate experiment should be repeated.

"Well done you, sir! That was a shot," exclaimed the self-instructing gentleman, opening his eyes to their widest. "I'd give a guinea, any day, to be able to lay my gun on like that. Why the ball went right on to her! How in the world did she ever get out of the water?"

"One hair's breadth more elevation, and she'd have caught it," replied Paul, handing back the rifle. "I suspect I was half-a-dozen yards short, and rico'd just over her back. The direction was as true as need be."

“Well, if you’d only show me how to do it to-morrow, I should really take it as a kindness. I’m obliged to go up to the house now. Hope you’re going to make some stay with us, sir?”

“Stay with you,” repeated Paul, puzzled, —“you live hereabouts, do you?”

“Landlord. At your service, sir. Maldon, my name is. St. Mark’s Bay Hotel.”

“Really! I’m delighted to hear it. Yes, I shall stay a day or so, at all events. How did you know I was at your hotel? You must give me a lesson in clairvoyance, in return for my rifle drill, Mr. Maldon.”

“Saw you, from down yonder, sir, go into the house with a knapsack on, and was happy to see you come out without it; which I took to be a good sign,” replied the landlord frankly. “Shall I leave you my gun, sir?”

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Paul thanked him, but declined the weapon. His resolution, after its late cooling at the Saracen, and dismal experience at the bank, was again beginning to assert itself. Between his volunteer landlord and obliging landlady, it would be odd, indeed, if he didn't obtain information enough to enable him to commence active operations.

There was an air, too, of romance about the very scene around him. The lady, upon his theory, must have resided very near. Had her fair foot ever paced those glossy sands, or perchance stepped out of that little green bathing-machine? Perhaps it had. Perhaps the whole thing was a delusion altogether. Why had he so hastily concluded that she had any connection with those wretched bank notes?

And so, refreshing himself with alternate doses of bright anticipation, and doleful

doubt, he strolled about until it was time to think of dinner.

Nothing could possibly have been nicer than that important meal, which Paul had wisely left to the discretion of his landlady. Both in selection and concoction, it showed an amiable care for the comfort and contentment of her guest; a kindness not less appreciable where the repast is to be honestly paid for, than where it is provided gratis in the dining-room of an acquaintance, to which you are only invited for socio-political reasons.

Dinners, however, are fleeting things, which, in their nature, cannot last. From the delicately fried whiting to the ripe Stilton, with its attendant glass of port, we proceed buoyantly enough wherever we are. But then, in a lonely sea-side coffee-room, however cosy and hospitable it may contrive

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to look, there loom before us some three unsatisfactory hours, which insist upon having work provided for them, and refuse, upon any terms, to depart until bed-time.

Luckily for Paul, the coffee-room table was amply provided with a scattered miscellany of light literature; and he got through his time fairly enough until the clock struck nine.

Then the silence of the place became annoying. The respectable family in the best sitting-room were as mute as mice. If they would only have sung, or cheered, or danced, or done anything to show that they were alive, it would have been a relief. So at last, with a yawn, he rose, filled his pipe, and walked out into the colonnade to enjoy a quiet smoke, and watch the moon rise over the bay.

"I beg your pardon," said his landlord's

cheery voice—the speaker suddenly appearing upon the lawn—“but would it be a liberty to ask if you would drink a tumbler of Mrs. Maldon’s punch, in our parlour, this evening. Mrs. Maldon is rather famous for her punch. You’ll excuse me, I’m sure, if I offend, but I am sorry we have no company for you in the coffee-room.”

“My dear sir,” replied Petersfeld, “when an invitation like yours needs an apology, we’ll talk about it. If you’ll only introduce me to Mrs. Maldon as a brother volunteer, it will save me the trouble of making my excuses for intruding. I’ll be with you in five minutes—directly I’ve finished my pipe.”

“Why,” said the landlord smiling, “you don’t suppose Mrs. Maldon would consider we could taste her punch, without a whiff of ’bacco going! Come along with me, sir. Over the step—this way.”

Mrs. Maldon's whiskey punch did not belie its reputation. A better brew never sent up its fragrant steam from the choice little bowl of real china which had belonged to her grandpapa. Her husband was in the best of good spirits. To have met with such a redoubtable volunteer comrade, who could graze gulls at five hundred yards, and belonged, as he was awed to discover, to the 'Devil's Own,' was a piece of good fortune to which he was never tired of reverting.

As to Mrs. Maldon, who cared less for ball-practice than for London anecdotes, Paul's information—of which he speedily became very profuse, appeared to border on the miraculous. How things 'got into the papers' had always been rather a mystery to her; but she accepted the fact of editorial omniscience just in the same blind way that all women believe in machinery. Tell them

that a thing is done by machinery, and difficulties vanish at once. There's nothing left to think about. A machine is a machine, just as a conjurer is a conjurer : and to push the matter further would be simply to blunder into a world of things which nobody understands.

But in Paul, Mrs. Maldon's admiring eyes beheld a man who had seen and even talked to many of the great people of whom she delighted to read :—who had dined in their houses, and knew their ways—who lived in a London Club, and was aware of even more than the newspapers themselves. So she freely accepted more than one tumbler of her own mellow punch, and believed that, in point of fashionable information, she was a made woman for life.

Of course this was just the time for Paul to push his inquiries ; and, observing that

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the more amusingly he talked the more liberally was the silver punch-ladle put in requisition, he lost no time in beginning.

“By the way, what’s the story, Mr. Maldon,” said he, in his usual blunt way, “about those thousand pound bank notes, lost last month by a neighbour of yours? They were advertised in the *Times*, and we talked about them in London, I recollect.”

“Admiral Mortlake lost them, sir. Lives at Riverwood Lawn—three miles on the London road. Had a mortgage paid off that afternoon. Would insist on having the money in bank notes, (that’s just his way,) and had his pocket picked before night. Serve him right! That’s what we all said at market. He was starting for abroad next morning for a longish trip, and I expect he took a nice temper with him.

Not much to boast of as far as that goes, any day."

"He's a bad sort of man, I think, is Admiral Mortlake," observed the landlady, "and, if he'd lost twice as much, we should all have said the same—serve him right! By the bye," added she, "that's the business that nasty little man, Tobacco they call him, has been pottering about the town for these last three weeks; isn't it, Maldon?"

"I expect it is," replied her husband. "Don't know what else he's up to. He was round here not two hours ago. I heard somebody say something the other day, I'm sure I forget what, about his being a Spy, paid by Admiral Mortlake. Spy, indeed! I'd have no spies in England, if I had my way. I'd shoot 'em—every man jack; that is if I could hit 'em. Wouldn't you, sir? I'll be bound you would!"

"I should think so ! And choose a tender place too. But, about this Admiral Mortlake," continued Paul, pretending to reflect. "Do I know him in London, or not ? What family has he ?"

"Only his wife, sir. No children. Only Miss Helen Fleetlands, a young lady who lives with him—a ward, I believe. Never a nicer young lady, in this world, ever walked through the grass or sat on a saddle.

"To be sure !" rejoined Petersfeld, quivering with excitement. "Helen Fleetlands is the very name—just about eighteen—very pretty—pale, clear complexion—pleasant girl to talk to—isn't she ? Oh, yes. I recollect."

"Ah ! I see you know her," interposed Mrs. Maldon, whose belief in Paul's experience had become so extensive, that she

would have considered it rather odd than otherwise if he hadn't known Helen. "Yes; she's just that. I'm only sorry they took her away with them; for I'm sure the poor child has no good time of it, where they are. But they did."

"Took her away? Abroad do you mean?"

"To be sure, sir. They all went together. They went to France."

Paul was staggered. If she had eloped in France he might as well give in at once, but that was impossible. Bloss had talked about the London detectives, and the sea-ports being watched. There was a mistake somewhere. That Miss Fleetlands was the lady in question, was, however, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

"Ah, I dare say you're right, Mrs. Maldon," he resumed, with pretended carelessness. "Only I hear a good deal of people's

movements, you see ; and, somehow, I fancied that Miss Fleetlands had not been of the party to the continent."

"But she was, sir," replied the landlady, taking down an account book, "and I'll tell you how I happen to know. They'd talked about going for some days before ; and, just before they started, Mrs. Mortlake sent to me to come up, about an account I had with her for fish. We supply them with fish and prawns, don't you see. Well, now, here it is, the very day, in my book. April 16th. That was the day I went up with my bill ; and Mrs. Mortlake sent me down word that she couldn't see me about business just then, as the carriage was at the door—and so it was—and she'd tell a servant to call on me next day and pay it—which she did. That's why I'm sure, sir."

"I see," said Paul, whose excitement became almost uncontrollable, as he recollected that the 17th of April was the exact date of the advertisement respecting the notes. "So you saw Miss Fleetlands that morning?"

"No, I did not. But I saw the servants, and they all spoke of her as going. She was not well that morning, now I come to recollect. And when the housemaid, Leah, came down here next day, about the bill, she told me they were all off."

In spite of his intense desire to press the matter further, Paul had sufficient delicacy to forbear.

He was confident that he was upon the right track: but it was equally certain that some mystery existed, of which his hospitable companions had no suspicion.

Under such circumstances, to communi-

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cate, or allow them to discover his doubts, seemed scarcely less than dishonourable. He was bound to solve the problem for himself—not to thrust his immature conjectures upon other people ; and so, in all probability, light up a fire of curiosity of which nobody could foresee the end. He must keep his misgivings to himself, for that night, at all events, and try his luck at Riverwood Lawn in the morning.

And so the conversation was allowed to flow back to London town, and proceeded until Mrs. Maldon's news-treasures began to mix as they multiplied, causing the unsatisfactory suspicion that there might be difficult work in the sorting.

There was a famous butcher of Bagdad, once, who, after habitually selling mutton-chops to a Magician for bran-new sequins, (which, as the story goes, he hoarded in a

bag by themselves,) awoke one morning to find these splendid coins a delusion; and that the pieces which he had so greedily accepted as silver from his regular and ready-money customer, were, for spending purposes, only 'leaves cut round.'

Probably Mrs. Maldon had never read the story; but some such experience seemed to be brewing.

However, after a hearty good-night, which his landlord insisted upon enlivening with a tremendous volunteer carol, commencing :—

“ When the false Foreigner, over the sea,
Vows to plant foot on old England the free,
This is the answer we'll make to the Man :—
' Come if you dare—and go back if you can !' ”

Paul took his departure, leaving Mr. Maldon delighted with the assurance that

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such sentiments were equally business-like and patriotic, and his wife sorely concerned lest they should have been considered unreasonable in the best sitting-room.

CHAPTER XI.

OVERLOOKING a broad plateau of perfectly level turf, studded with mighty clumps of immemorial oak, stands the low, irregular, turreted stone mansion which has, for a couple of centuries at least, borne the name of Riverwood Lawn.

Behind rise the tree-tops of the woodland which fringes, at that spot, the river St. Mark.

On either side, half buried among close-clipped hedges of the densest yew, lie the flower gardens, with their stone stairs, stone seats, stone balls, stone sundials, and fish-

ponds rimmed with stone. Were our ancestors really so cold blooded? Did ever man actually sit down to plot and plan one of these rectangular petrified pleasaunces without a quiet chuckle over his diagram? There must be some joke in the matter long since lost for ever; but nothing, to my mind, carries one back to the days which are gone, more than these austere old gardens.

Old houses burn or tumble down; or, if they stand, have probably been improved and furnished into something quite beyond the expectations of their first inhabitants. Old parks have changed their timber, their boundaries, and their ancient fence; or towns have sprung up and choked them; and we cannot feel certain in what degree, if at all, they preserve their olden aspect.

But, in these old gardens, substantially nothing is altered. The clipped hedges

stand exactly as they stood two hundred years ago. The steps, the seats, the vases, are identical. They also stand where they always stood, and look as they always looked, except for Time's modest livery of rusty green. The Nymphs and Apollos wear exactly the same plump good-natured expression which they wore when there used to be something worth simpering at, in the way of company, around their pedestals. Their faces no doubt are woefully mottled, and they have suffered somewhat from frost-bite or other grievance in the matter of fingers and noses. But they would tell you, if they could, that such as you see the garden now, such it was in the days of the Vandyke'd gallants of the Stuart time, and the periwigged, square-toed, snuff-box-carrying dandies of Queen Anne.

They could tell you a great deal more,

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too, I suspect, if they chose. I should like to have that bashful Venus in the witness-box for half an hour. I should like to know all she has seen in that secret bower of yew, into which she still persists in prying with inextinguishable curiosity. Unless our elder dramatists drew very strangely upon their imagination, the reminiscences of her early statuehood ought to comprise a great deal that would be well worth hearing.

Of the Lawn itself I am not ready at present to say much. The family are away. The blinds are down, the carpets up, and the furniture smothered in brown-holland. In due time, when it is in a fit state to receive us, we will make ourselves fairly at home. Meanwhile let us accompany Petersfeld thither, upon his first early visit.

After a capital breakfast at the St. Mark's

Bay Hotel, and a few cheery words with his landlord, who was counting his cartridges in the bar parlour, Paul set out upon his tour of discovery. An hour's walking brought him to the lodge, the gate at which was opened by a small child who plucked its hair respectfully as he passed in. A long carriage sweep, winding through a well-grown shrubbery, led to the front entrance, near which stood a gardener busily engaged in preparing some flower-beds for his approaching bedding out.

Paul at once broke ground with his accustomed affability. "I'm afraid I shan't have the pleasure of seeing Admiral Mortlake this morning. He's abroad, I hear."

"If you ain't going abroad, I'm afraid you won't," replied the gardener, coolly.

"Did you expect to see him?"

"Came from London on some business of

his, at all events. Can you give me his address?"

"Can't give you anything of his. What did the old woman at the gate say?"

"Didn't see her, unfortunately; so I had to walk in."

"Old donkey;" muttered the gardener, apostrophising his absent wife. "If you're a friend of Admiral Mortlake's, sir, why all right. If you ain't, why we've our orders at the Lodge, you see: and those orders are, No Thorough Fair."

"All right! When I asked for the Admiral's address, I only meant to enquire where a letter would reach him; and that I suppose I can find out at the house."

"That's the house," said the man with a jerk of his head, as if he washed his hands of the whole affair. "I've nothing to do with the house. If you're going there, that's it."

"I *am* going to the house," replied Paul, good humouredly; "so you needn't have taken me for a tramp. Have a cigar?" continued he, producing his case. "These are fresh from London. Try one."

For a moment the man looked at him distrustfully. But, after all, the cigar looked less like a bribe than a peace offering, and he was an amateur in tobacco.

"Thanky sir," he said. "You'll excuse my mentioning that this was no Thorough Fair; but we've the Admiral's orders to mention as much, unless we know the party."

"Quite right too. And when the Admiral gives an order he means it, I've no doubt."

"That he does, and no mistake. What he says has got to be minded: and so it should. If you'll just go round the corner,

sir, and ring the front door bell, you'll be attended to."

The front door, to which Petersfeld had been directed, was on the side of the house opposite that which overlooked the lawn. It was covered in with a massive stone portico large enough to admit a carriage, and had altogether an antique, imposing air.

There was no occasion to ring the bell, for the door stood open, and a coquettish-looking housemaid was shaking a mat upon the steps. She stopped in her work on perceiving Paul, and said "fiff!" by way of apology for the dust.

"Good morning," said Paul. "The gardener has sent me here for Admiral Mortlake's address. Do you happen to know where he is at present?"

"I can tell you where we send his letters

to, if that will do," returned the girl, looking for a card upon the hall table. "This is it. Grand Hotel, Paris."

"All there, are they? Mrs. Mortlake and Miss Fleetlands?"

"Oh yes! They're all there."

"Miss Fleetlands went with them then?"

"Why of course! What do you want to know about Miss Fleetlands for?" suddenly added the housemaid with a saucy twinkle in her eye, as she looked at Paul from head to foot, and noticed his handsome face and dashing tout ensemble.

"Hum!" said Paul. "That's my look out. I doubt if you could keep a secret if I told you one."

"Couldn't I?" exclaimed the damsel, who was beginning to feel highly curious. "You try!"

"Well, the fact is, I rather wanted to

find out where Miss Fleetlands is at present. However, if she's in Paris, that's enough."

"O, I know she's there; because only two days ago she wrote to me to send over some things out of her drawers, and something which she said her dressmaker in the town yonder had forgotten to bring home before she went, and a pretty piece of work we had about it, and one or two things I couldn't find after all. That's how I know she's there. But you said there was a secret, sir, you know."

"Only this—that I asked you any question at all about her. Buy a new ribbon for my sake, and keep that piece of news to yourself," continued Paul, slipping a five shilling piece into her hand.

"Well I'm sure, sir, I'm much obliged; but it's very little of a secret to keep. I'll be bound I won't tell anybody."

"And you're sure you've told me everything — everything, mind!" added Paul significantly.

"I don't quite understand you, sir—don't see quite what you want to know. Unless," continued she, turning the crown piece over and over in her hand, as if its acceptance pledged her to unlimited gossip, "unless, indeed—but maybe what I was going to say, don't concern you in the least, you see."

"How should I know?" cried Paul. "You'd better say it. Then I'll tell you."

"Why," rejoined the girl, simpering, "it just depends upon whether you was a thinking of keeping company with our Miss Helen. You see I can't tell why you come asking about her, and likely enough you know your own business, but if you had a mind that way, I should say you'd better

be more careful than common — that's all."

"More careful than common! Why in the world should I be more careful than common? My good girl, tell me exactly what you mean, and I'll give you a new bonnet, to trim the ribbon on."

"O no," said the girl. "I don't mind a ribbon; but I ain't going to tell tales for new bonnets. Only as you have behaved quite the gentleman, sir, I shouldn't like to see you get into the same trouble as others have. Our Miss Helen," continued she, sinking her voice to a whisper, "isn't exactly like other young ladies. Don't you come a-courting of her, sir. She mustn't be married."

"Good gracious—go on!" gasped Paul. "What's the matter with her?"

"Well, we never quite made out the

rights of it," replied the housemaid mysteriously, "though we've talked it over often enough, you may be sure. But she mustn't. Not three months ago, or thereabouts, there was a young gentleman came after her, much about your age, I should say, sir ; a soldier captain, he was, and she liked him, too, we all said. They used to ride together when the hounds were out, and it was quite pretty, like, her groom used to say, to see the way he'd follow her all across the country ; and it took a good one too, to do that, for she's a rare young lady to gallop, is our Miss Helen. And so, of course, we all considered it was a match, and nobody had a word to say against it, for he was every bit like a soldier, he was, and a nice pleasant-spoken gentleman, even fit for our Miss Helen, and that's not saying a little.

“ Well, we never heard, any of us, that there was any difficulty in the way. Our Miss Helen has heaps of money, they say, and he, we found out, had a great estate not many miles off, and was going to be a noble lord viscount some time ; and we were just wondering when the wedding was to be, when lo and behold you, just as he was a-walking up to this very door one morning, up steps an officer from London, and ‘ You’re my prisoner, captain !’ says he, ‘ God save the Queen !’

“ ‘ What now,’ says the captain. ‘ What have I done ?’

“ ‘ Goin’ after Miss Fleetlands,’ says the officer. ‘ That’s it. So you come along.’

“ ‘ Hands off !’ says the captain, and knocks him right through that holly-bush, yonder.

“ ‘Murder, alive!’ shouted the officer.
‘Catch him somebody, afore I’m stung to
death in this beastly tree!’

“ Well, up rushes the officer’s man, for
there was two of them, and catches up the
captain like a baby, and they two goes to
work like executioners, and puts handcuffs
on his hands, and fetters on his feet, and
carries him off—kicking and calling—I
believe you, to a cart, and drives him right
away to London ; and there he is this day,
sir, if you’ll believe me, in dungeon deep,
and won’t be let out never no more. Never,
no, never! That’s why I say our Miss
Helen isn’t like other young ladies. She
mustn’t be married. We found that out
among ourselves. By talking, sir. Our
Miss Helen must be left alone.”

Paul stood for a moment like a man in a
dream. “ Are you quite certain of all this?”

he was beginning, when the housekeeper's voice was heard upon the stairs.

"O, you must go, please!" exclaimed the girl, "or I shall catch it for talking," and almost before he found himself clear of the portico, the mat was again in such tremendous requisition, that even to look back was at the risk of being smothered.

Not caring again to encounter the surly gardener, Paul took the opposite walk to that by which he had arrived, and which led into a dark suite of yew-surrounded gardens.

Beyond,—just where they opened upon a spacious lawn,—stood a pretty summer-house, or rustic temple, of unbarked pine. It was a place upon which a good deal of taste and care had evidently been expended. The windows were of coloured glass, and the oaken parquet curiously inlaid. The

table and chairs were, likewise, all of massive oak. There was a snug little fire-place, large enough to boil the kettle upon tea-drinking occasions, and upon either side of it, large oaken cupboards, which perhaps contained the paraphernalia necessary for such temperate festivity.

Paul walked in and sat down. He was too much bewildered by his own recent discoveries to indulge in romantic conjectures as to whether he might not, at that moment, be smoking his cigar in Helen's own favourite bower.

He was trying in vain to reduce all that he had learned since his arrival at St. Mark's, into some sort of consistency, and to make it square, if possible, with the contents of the two advertisements, and the information which he had obtained from Bloss.

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But the attempt was hopeless. It was like unravelling a tangled skein, in which to untwist one end is only to ensure a tighter knot at the other. That Helen Fleetlands was the person of whom he was in search, he was more than ever certain. His landlady's instant recognition of her as described in the advertisement, was conclusive upon that head. Again Miss Fleetlands had actually left Riverwood Lawn upon the very day, or day after, the loss of the bank notes advertised by Admiral Mortlake. These were clearly the 'little fortune' of which Bloss had spoken; in fact, the whole chain of events thus far fitted to a nicety. The detectives had been placed upon her track, and upon their failure, the second advertisement had been inserted in the papers, addressed upon the same authority, to those who had got her.

That so extremely nice a young lady as 'our Miss Helen' should have picked her guardian's pocket in such confoundedly good earnest, was of course improbable enough at the first blush. But Paul was in no mood for arguing at that moment. He had got among facts, and motives might take care of themselves. Some such act of 'graceful self-possession' had perhaps led to those qualities having been so conspicuously noticed in the advertisement.

Indeed, if there had been reason to conclude that the young lady had then and thereupon decamped with her plunder, Paul would have had a fair start enough. To know more would be to fathom the grand secret itself, for the resolution of which five hundred pounds had just been offered—where had she gone—where was she then? And this he didn't expect to discover with-

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out such sustained and arduous exertion as would render his name a household word for indomitable and successful energy through some time to come.

But then arose the calm bewildering fact agreed to upon all hands, that she had left the Lawn in company with Admiral Mortlake and his wife, and was at that moment spending her time with them in Paris. Upon this point it seemed scarcely possible that everybody should be mistaken, especially the gossiping housemaid, who had clearly told the truth to the best of her belief, and who had actually heard from her at the Grand Hotel.

So the question seemed to resolve itself into this dilemma: was Miss Fleetlands at that moment in Paris, or was she not?

If she was, all was delusion from beginning to end. Never since the world began

had a man been so unaccountably and egregiously misled.

If she was not, then indeed matters wore a perplexing aspect. Everybody about St. Mark's must have been deliberately and successfully deceived by the Admiral, for some purpose of his own, which Paul, at the moment, felt it impossible to conjecture. But taken in connection with Mrs. Maldon's remark, that Helen had no good time of it in his house, it suggested unpleasant misgivings, and made Paul quite flush with excitement, like a champion with a task before him.

As to the wild myth of the chained and captive Captain,—his unintelligible offence and condign punishment—it seemed rather like a page out of the Arabian Nights than an episode of modern life in England. But it was evidently a romance of the back-stairs

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—a story which wouldn't bear examination for a moment. The captain had probably been arrested—captains often were ; and this was the wise version of the story, with which his own groom, probably, had entertained the servants' hall. Paul knew more of the world than to take his facts from housemaids.

Upon the main question, however, there was only one thing to be done. To rest in his present state of doubt was impossible. To breakfast on the boulevards next morning was easy. It was not in his nature to pause for one moment when any active measure suggested itself.

Great was the disappointment of his hospitable host and hostess when Paul returned about noon, and announced that pressing business compelled him to terminate his visit, and take the next train to London.

Mrs. Maldon was vexed at losing her fashionable and amusing guest. Mr. Maldon had still more cause to be sorry. He had employed the whole morning in polishing up his rifle—until, from nose-cap to heel-plate, it shone like gold and silver. It was too bad that the bloody business of the afternoon, upon which he had counted so securely, should be indefinitely postponed. All had been well enough before Petersfeld came. But to go out again by himself to blaze at the gannets with all his new-born consciousness that rifle-shooting was rather an art, and that his own performance was probably disregarded by the birds themselves, as a mere noisy nuisance, undeserving of the attention of any sensible fowl, was too much for his philosophy.

There was no help for it, however; as Paul was bent upon departing by the mid-day

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express. So, after a good deal of leave-taking, and a sort of undertaking upon his part to return within a week, and bring his rifle with him, he was allowed to shoulder his knapsack and march off to the station.

His friend, the jolly-looking porter, received him with the greatest deference as he appeared upon the platform.

‘So Paul had had a pleasant evening at St. Mark’s Bay? To be sure he had! Else he wouldn’t have recommended the house—not he! As for himself, hadn’t he just taken the change out of that half-crown? Never had anybody enjoyed a dinner more—that was his opinion. It was lovely.’

And, before the bell rang for starting, Paul had been regaled with a complete *menu* of the most savoury and wonderful entertainment that had ever been ordered and devoured by a single glutton regardless

of expense, or—which the porter appeared to consider as the same thing—with no necessary limit to extravagance short of two and six.

Just as the train was on the move, after having placed Paul in a compartment to himself, from which, as he assured him, ladies and babies would be rigidly excluded by the guard all the way to London, he suddenly re-appeared at the window.

“See that snuffy little chap there, sir?” he said, pointing to a small, ill-conditioned man, who was apparently looking out for a seat. “That chap’s name’s Tobacco. He’s a spy. A London spy, he is. Up to some game, you may depend upon it. Little rascal; he’s going to town!”

“A spy, is he? Looks more like an undertaker in difficulties,” said Paul, as the individual in question shambled into a

third-class carriage. "Get me a Bradshaw, will you, at that book-stall." And the train rolled away.

After the usual display of cheerful perseverance and intellectual dexterity which it seems to have been the main object of the compiler of our national hand-book to elicit, Paul succeeded in ascertaining that he would be in London by 3.30. There was a train for Folkestone at four in connection with the tidal boat, and he might reach Paris soon after midnight. So he resolved to go straight through.

Upon his arrival at London Bridge station, and whilst taking his ticket for Paris, he was not exactly disconcerted, but certainly surprised, to observe at a little distance no other a personage than Mr. Tobacco. Could it be possible that he himself—Paul Petersfeld—was the mark of that hideous

little animal? A dim confused suspicion that he had been treading dangerous ground seemed to arise in his mind without any assignable reason. And then the housemaid's concluding warning—"Our Miss Helen must be left alone," came back like an echo. But what had he done?

That was just the question the Captain had asked, when, according to her account, he was knocked down to the tune of 'God save the Queen,' and carried away tied, in a tax cart.

However, there was no need to pursue the enquiry; since Mr. Tobacco made no attempt to enter the train; although he lingered in view rubbing his nose wistfully through the barrier-railings, until it was fairly under steam for Folkestone.

CHAPTER XII.

It was long past midnight, when Paul found himself at last upon the Boulevard des Capuchins.

This was of little consequence. Nobody ever goes to bed in Paris—nobody, at least, whose presence could be of the slightest interest to a newly arrived traveller. Paul might have had a ‘diner à la carte’ at ten minutes notice. But he had dined at Amiens, during that convulsive ‘vingt minutes d’arrêt,’ which at once gives individuality to the town, and provides the single

reminiscence of it which most Englishmen carry away. So he only went to bed.

By whatsoever token it may please posterity to distinguish this present era, nothing is more certain than that it will be hereafter referred to as the age of hotels. In those palatial edifices which are so fast rising in every direction—which form part of every railway terminus, and overshadow the roofs of every watering-place, and appropriate the best places in our streets and squares, I see something more than the result of a mere joint-stock mania. I see not only a step, but a stride, in the march of comfort and civilization ; and heartily wish I could secure to every shareholder a regular dividend of fifteen per cent., with a handsome bonus at frequent intervals. I should like also to be a considerable shareholder myself upon these terms. And, as a fair sample of a

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comparatively new state of things, I recommend the Grand Hotel, Paris.

A man must indeed be strangely impassive who could walk into that noble *Cour d'honneur* for the first time, without an agreeable sensation.

It is something to feel that one is going to be so royally lodged and cared for. But the real wonder of the place lies in those interminable furlongs of soft-carpeted corridors—Boulevards, as they are aptly called—rising five stories high, each a swarming hive of guests.

By what mysterious arrangement can the countless wants of this great multitude be provided for? What waiter's sanity would be worth an hour's purchase, exposed to the competitive jangling of five hundred bells? All is easy, nevertheless. There is a *bureau de service*—one or more—upon each Boule-

vard. Touch the little ivory button of your bed-room telegraph, and you have at once the satisfaction of knowing that you have set a fiery little demon chattering, whose tongue will never rest until your wants have been attended to. You have, as it were, your own particular landlord with all his myrmidons close at hand. And, practically, you find that the requirements of half a thousand people are far more quickly and comfortably provided for, than those of a dozen at the Saracen.

Another advantage, not less noteworthy, is that you can at any moment ascertain the names of all your fellow-guests. There are five mahogany compartments in the grand bureau, on the ground floor, corresponding with the five boulevards above stairs, in which the name and date of each arrival is at once inserted. It seems a simple busi-

ness enough ; but the slovenly way in which this important duty is discharged, or rather neglected, at most old fashioned hotels, converts into matter of praise what would otherwise only call for simple approval.

Before these gigantic muster-rolls, Paul took his stand early the next morning, in much the same condition of nervous excitement with which, as he well recollected, he had, not many years before, searched for his own name upon the pillar in the Senate House. It is wonderful what a blinding, bewildering affair reading becomes under such circumstances. The very letters seem to be writing themselves over again whilst you read, and loop, and twist, and dance, and dazzle, until we begin to doubt whether our education has been as complete as it might have been. But there was no mistake at last.

“L’ Amiral et Mme. Mortlake, et Mlle.

Fleetlands," said the scroll. "Arrivés le 19° Avril." Their rooms were on the second boulevard.

Paul whistled, and walked away. The crisis had come at last. If that oracular board was to be believed, Miss Fleetlands was probably at that moment dressing within twenty yards of him.

Of course she was: and the people at St. Mark's perfectly in the right. The odd thing would have been to find them all in the wrong. But then what a hideous unintelligible enigma was the whole affair! Who had run away, if she had not? What did the advertisement mean? Lunacy at three-and-twenty was a bad look out; but that was what matters were coming to. However, under the same roof with her at last, something definite must surely be arrived at.

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Even to see her. That in itself would be worth a journey to Paris. To sit next her at the table d' hôte. That would be better still, and easily managed. In the meanwhile a question or so at the *bureau de service* of the second boulevard would put him at once in possession of the usual hours and habits of the admiral and his ladies, and enable him without difficulty to identify them. So upstairs he went.

As I have already explained, there is, at the Grand Hotel, a *bureau de service* upon every floor, at which of course, with very little trouble, you may ascertain all the secrets of its inhabitants. Foreign waiters are not apt to be discreet. Their delight is to lay a long forefinger on the top of their nose, and tell you more than you expected.

"Good morning!" said Paul, marching suddenly into the room. "Admiral Mort-

lake, an Englishman, lives, I hear, upon this floor. He has two ladies with him, hasn't he?"

"Nein—nein!" replied the *gen' de service*, shaking his head, with a smile.

"Nonsense! Nine ladies in two rooms! —that won't do," retorted Paul. "Admiral Mortlake's the man I'm asking about. Fellow from England. Wouldn't think of such a thing."

"Neun damen habe ich nicht gesagt, mein Herr. Mit der Herr Admiral ist nur eine Dame, die gnädige Frau. Niemand anders."

"Come, I say! That's not French, anyhow," exclaimed Paul, impatiently. "Parley Français, my good fellow, if you can't parley Anglais, which would save no end of trouble. You've no idea how easy it is. Try it on!"

“Ja wohl! Jezt verstehe ich der Herr,” replied the good humoured Bavarian, who always will start in his own language until driven out of it by main force. “You ask me about your English Admiral. Well, he is yonder: in the room at the end of the corridor. Last door on the left. By the stairs. His wife is with him. No one else. He has kept a room engaged these many days for his fraulein. But she has not come yet, and will not come now, for they start this morning for Normandie. They and my lady’s kammer-jungfer — her maid. I am even now making out their note.”

“By George, what a rage I should have been in if I’d missed them. Now look here,” continued Paul, “I want to know this very particularly. Are you quite sure that Miss did not arrive with them here?”

Are you certain that she has never been in this house?"

"Quite certain, mein Herr," replied the man confidently. "I know it all the more because two days ago I asked my lady's maid why that expensive room was kept empty so long, when miss did not come. And she said O, that miss had gone to pay a visit among some friends in the Faubourg St. Germain, and that the Admiral wished to keep her room, because it was next his own, and he expected her at the hotel every day. And also, because money was of no consequence. O that I were such a lucky lord as that!"

"Seems an odd arrangement, doesn't it?" pursued Petersfeld. "Miss must be very fond of her friends in the Faubourg."

"Ha! Just what I said to the maid," returned the *gen' de service*. "I said to her,

Fraulein, I begin to think that you've lost this young lady of yours, and that we shall never have the pleasure of seeing her here at all—hein? And then she looked at me, all dark and angry, and demanded of me, what business it was of mine? I wonder why your nation are so fond of asking that? No other people do it. I am almost afraid to say to an English fellow-servant 'Wie befinden Sie sich?' for fear he should enrage himself and make that reply."

"What time do these people start?" inquired Petersfeld, who was in no mood to moralize over insular peculiarities. "You tell me they're going this morning."

"Ja wohl. They have ordered a carriage at half-past ten to take them to the Railway Station—Rue St. Lazare. That is all I know."

"Do they breakfast in their rooms?"

"O no. They breakfast daily in the coffee-room restaurant below. Let me see," continued the Bavarian, looking at the clock,—“they will be going down directly I should think. It is now halb zehn—nearly half-past nine.”

“All right,” said Paul, and took his stand upon the great staircase within view of the door of their apartment. Perhaps his notions of what could possibly be done in the way of action under the circumstances were not very definite; but his curiosity to see the Admiral, and at least carry away a living image of that man in his mind, was indescribable.

He had not long to wait. In a few moments the door opened, and Admiral and Mrs. Mortlake passed him as they descended.

Once seen, the Admiral was not a man to

be easily forgotten. Solid and square built, with a red weather-beaten face, he looked the very impersonation of physical power combined with unconquerable resolve. The stubborn under-jaw—the broad battle-broken nose—the iron forehead, and those self-reliant hempen-shaded eyes, that so seldom and so slowly looked either to the right or left, all told the same story.

Nor was his dress less characteristic. His trousers, cut after a fashion exploded years before most of us were trousered at all, showed that he was not a man to change with the times or ask his tailor's opinion as to the prevailing pattern. An immense bunch of gold seals dangled from his fob. His rough blue coat had flaps, and side pockets, and gilt buttons, and these, with a low-crowned hat and ponderous oaken cudgel, were the prominent points which

struck Petersfeld upon his first brief inspection.

Mrs. Mortlake was tall, angular, and frightfully prim. She had a thin aquiline nose, dark uncompromising eyebrows, and no lips. She was dressed entirely in black, and as Paul looked at the couple, he thought that the young lady had exercised a very sound discretion in running away.

Neither she nor her husband took the slightest notice of Paul as they passed him upon the stairs. It didn't seem to be their way. They marched doggedly on into the coffee-room, and took their seats at a table which had been reserved for them; and Paul, whose appetite reminded him that his own breakfast had not yet been accomplished, accepted the services of a waiter, who was bent upon interesting everybody with the

contents of a little tract, entitled, 'Les plats du jour.'

The Admiral and his wife breakfasted in silence. No domestic confidences, at all events reached Paul's ear. And, the meal over, Mrs. Mortlake retired to her apartment, while the Admiral, lighting his cigar, paced sternly forth into the 'Cour d'honneur.'

There Petersfeld had the opportunity of regarding him at leisure. And, to tell the truth, he recognised, in that solid, imperturbable man, a great deal more than his match. He felt positively afraid of him, as his imagination suggested the sudden and picturesque result, if, by any process of divination, his own rash secret could be discovered on the spot. Mere manslaughter would scarcely satisfy the soul of such a tremendous Tartar. However, there was no immediate cause for anxiety.

Punctually, at half past ten, the carriage rolled into the court-yard. The luggage was brought down, and Mrs. Mortlake appeared in travelling costume, attended by a shrewish-looking maid.

Paul resolved to take a fiacre and follow the vehicle to the station. There was just the shadow of a possibility that Miss Fleetlands might join them there; and it was as well to leave no loophole whatever open to future doubt.

It often happens, to those whose ears and eyes are alive to every suggestion, that some unexpected clue suddenly presents itself, which to less observant or less practical people, would have no significance whatever. Upon the Admiral's portmanteau, as it was being placed upon the coach-box, Paul noticed an old address, which had not been removed. It was 'Lord Warden

Hotel, Dover.' An idea instantly glanced upon his mind. They had come to Paris by that route. He had only to return the same way to ascertain, beyond all possibility of mistake, whether Miss Fleetlands had actually left England with them.

If she had not, then, that the Admiral was playing some deep inexplicable game which had hitherto duped everybody was decided; and he would never rest until he had penetrated the mystery, and otherwise played the part of a true knight in the adventure. If she had — but his common-sense told him that it was otherwise, and that he had only to make assurance doubly sure.

His drive to the railway station simply confirmed his conjecture that Admiral and Mrs. Mortlake would depart alone. There was nothing for it but to return to London

viâ Dover. So after ascertaining that the Admiral had desired his letters to be forwarded to him at the Hôtel d' Angleterre Quai des paquebots — Rouen, he quitted the Grand Hotel a wiser but far from satisfied man.

At the 'Lord Warden' he had little difficulty in ascertaining that the Mortlakes had slept there on the night of the 18th of April, en route for the continent. Miss Fleetlands was not in their company. Her name had not been mentioned. With the exception of Mrs. Mortlake's maid, they had been quite alone.

* * * * *

"Now!" exclaimed Paul, giving the fire a tremendous stab, which sent the sparks roaring up the chimney, "that's the end of

my travels, Worsley. Tell us what you think of them.

"Anyhow," replied I, "I admit that your character for energy is, from this moment, beyond all possible question. After our conversation of the other morning you ought to be proud of the admission."

"Upon my word, I think I've earned it. But now, Worsley, what's to be made of the whole business?"

"Well," replied I, "taking the story as you state it, just listen to the reply I should make as to the probabilities of the case, if I were counsel on the other side in one of our own courts. In the first place, you fall upon the track of Miss Fleetlands through the medium of these lost bank notes. Do you seriously believe that she ran away with them?"

"Why," replied Paul, looking slightly

confused, "I declare, since I first hit off the right scent, I've thought about nothing but herself. Forgot the notes altogether. Probably they were her own."

"Not very likely; if they were those which the Admiral advertised. But, now, look here. Your theory is, that the young lady of the advertisement is your Miss Fleetlands?"

"Of course she is. The description agrees perfectly. So does the time at which she left her home. The whole thing squares exactly."

"No doubt. But the lady whom you and Bloss talked about, was, if you recollect, as he said, pursued by detectives before she was twelve hours over the lawn. Search had been made for her everywhere—the sea-ports watched—and yet she had never been heard of from that time to this. Now your

Miss Fleetlands, according to the united testimony of everybody most likely to know, both at her own house and in St. Mark's, started quietly for Paris, in pursuance of a long-arranged plan, in the company of her guardian and his wife."

"She never got there, though!"

"Granted. But the Admiral and his wife did. Now, I put it to your common sense, is it conceivable that had she eloped upon the road, either with or without a considerable sum of money, they would have complacently pursued their way to the continent, contenting themselves with putting an advertisement in the papers, to the effect that, if found, she was to be packed up and left with Mr. Bloss?"

"Botheration! Of course it isn't probable. But why did they stick her name up at the hotel, and pretend she was in Paris, when

she wasn't? You don't half see your way through it yet, Master Worsley."

"Perhaps not. We pass all at once from the improbable to the mysterious."

"That's it, exactly. What right has a guardian to be mysterious about his ward? Say what you like, I'd lay my head upon it that Miss Fleetlands is the missing girl; and the more perplexing—the more incomprehensible the whole story becomes, the more I am determined to find out whether I'm not right. It's the very charm of the whole affair. You can't make head or tail of it. Neither can I. Wonder whether Kinghorn would! But, when I clear up the whole affair, who'll laugh then? There's a grand discovery to be made, I'm sure. Wrong to be put right, perhaps. By the way, though," suddenly exclaimed Petersfeld, starting upright as he spoke, "I

declare, all this time, I've been forgetting the most stunning thing of all! This very night—when we were dining with Buttermere—I declare it seems a week ago already—that little girl Linda, you remember—I sat beside her at dinner—when we were talking about this affair—”

“Of course. What about her?”

“Why, she told me—mark this, Worsley! that she knew all about the matter: knew who the girl was, where she lived, and where she is now. Think of that!”

“Little humbug. Did you believe her?”

“When she gave me names. Not before. I told her she was only chaffing, and then she went to work with those natty little fingers of hers, and spelt out right away ‘Helen Fleetlands—Riverwood.’ How now, Worsley, hey?”

“I think that you have made a most

valuable acquaintance for your purpose," returned I, considerably surprised by the intelligence. "You two should start together, in partnership, in search of Miss Helen and her five hundred. Only that would be next door to bigamy. But you should have stroked her a little and asked for more."

"So I would. Only the ladies, bother them, chose to go just at that moment, and I never got a chance afterwards. I'd give something to have another talk with her."

"That you may, easily. She and her sisters are going to the Zoological Gardens to-morrow afternoon. Meet them there, and the thing's done."

"The deuce they are! How do you know? She never told me. I wonder at that."

"It was certainly very inconsiderate.

Bunnytail told me. I asked him if he had been to the Cattle Show, by way of finding some subject in which he might possibly take an interest, and he said, 'no—but he was going to-morrow; whilst his partner yonder,' pointing to that extraordinary wife of his, 'preferred going, with the Buttermere young ladies, to some shabby show in the Regent's Park of outlandish beasts, that would never pay for their own litter. He gave 'em joy of it, he did.'

"My dear Worsley, you've done me a signal service! won't I go—that's all! Stay and drink good luck to my chance. At all events, finish your cigar. All may turn upon this. I declare, though, I wouldn't take such a short cut in the matter, if I didn't feel that, knowing what I now know, it might be a sin to lose time."

"My good fellow, it's past twelve o'clock,

and I'm off. I start for the country to-morrow, and have work to arrange before leaving. I can be of no further use to you, at present. Good night. Go on upon your own hook—always the best way."

"Good night, if you must go. I hoped we might have struck out something clear; but never mind. Let us see what comes of to-morrow. At all events, when we next meet in Lincoln's Inn, you shall find that I have a story to tell. Good night, and good-bye, for the present!"

And so Petersfeld went to bed, and to sleep, and had a rather remarkable dream.

He found himself walking alone with Linda in a sequestered part of the Zoological Gardens, into which they had wandered, far away from the rest of their party. And by way of securing a perfectly retired place, in which to converse about Helen,

without any rational fear of interruption, they entered an empty crocodile's den, the door of which had propitiously been left unfastened. And as they got into very deep and interesting conversation indeed, and 'locked up' for that purpose, closer and closer upon the crocodile's plank, a deaf old janitor of the gardens came by and locked them in.

Naturally they both shouted a good deal, for it was growing desperately dark ; but, owing to the peculiar atmosphere of the place, Paul was conscious that he could only crow like a crocodile, while Linda whistled in accompaniment, like some unearthly fowl.

Of course, in the Zoological Gardens, where noises of the kind are only too common, such a proceeding was useless, and they passed the night unpleasantly enough ; Linda insisting that Paul should climb to

the very topmost bar of the iron rails, and cling on there until morning—whilst she arranged her virgin couch amid all the comforts of a crocodile's roost.

And, when morning came, it came attended by Mr. and Mrs. Buttermere; who, after motioning Petersfeld down, somewhat sternly unbolted the door, and, with a few sententious remarks of orthodox purport, led the way to a neighbouring church, where he and Linda were married on the spot by a mild looking gentleman fast asleep.

But this was only a dream.

CHAPTER XIII.

LUNCHEON was over in Harley Street, and the three Buttermere young ladies assembled in the drawing-room in walking array, as the clock upon the chimney-piece chimed two.

“Here’s the carriage coming round,” observed Lotty, looking out of the window. “I wonder whether those horrid Bunny-tails will be punctual. Lucky for them papa’s not at home to see the horses kept waiting.”

“Well, they haven’t begun to wait yet,”

said Loo. "Country people are always punctual. Besides, these wretches dine at twelve, and begged mamma particularly not to be later than two. Imagine any creature, calling itself human, confessing to a regular twelve o'clock dinner. Je le crois parceque c'est incroyable. Only fancy the enormity of the thing."

"After all, what does it signify?" remarked Linda. "Two hours of wild-beast-land will surely be enough for everybody."

"O, I should think so!" drawled Lotty—"unless, indeed, they find something more interesting than wild beasts to divert them."

"By the way," exclaimed Linda, starting at the last suggestion, "I quite forgot to ask you before. Which of you told Mr.

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Petersfeld, last night, that we were going to the Zoo to-day?"

Each of the young ladies to whom this question was addressed looked a little disconcerted. But Lotty, who had most presence of mind, judiciously answered—"Loo did."

"Did you, Loo?" demanded Linda.

"To be sure I did. Hasn't Lotty just told you so?" replied Loo, awkwardly trying to divide the fib.

"Well, and what did he say?" persisted Linda.

"Didn't say anything. What should he say?"

"Now, really, Loo, you are too provoking! Did you make him understand, or not? You are not answering fairly, and you know it!"

"I know," replied Loo, with useless pre-

varication, "that I told it to Mr. Goldwin after dinner—here, by the tea-table—and Mr. Petersfeld was standing close by—just where that chair is, and heard every word. I had no chance of telling him otherwise. He scarcely spoke to me once, all the evening."

"How do you know he heard?"

"O, come, Linda, it's useless going on in this way! He was quite close enough to hear, and I'll answer for it, he did, for he was doing nothing in the world at the time, except letting you show him those foolish Dutch photographs."

"A likely time to make him hear, wasn't it, when he was talking to *me*!" exclaimed Linda with perfect naïveté. "*I* didn't hear, I promise you! I really am ashamed of you both," continued she, with a little stamp of vexation. "When people make wagers,

all is supposed to be straightforward and 'pon honour. Ours was not a very wise one, perhaps, and I shouldn't have made it except that I was put out at the moment. But you must both admit that I won it fairly, so far as last night went. And then, that you might have a dishonourable crow over me to-day, you deliberately broke your part of the bargain, whilst I most faithfully kept mine. However, if you don't feel sufficiently ashamed of yourselves already, nothing that I can say will make you."

"That's quite possible," retorted Lotty dryly, yet with an annoying consciousness that Linda had the best of it. "As you are not satisfied, the wager shall be off."

"To be sure," said Loo. "We don't want to win your gloves. The wager is off!"

"Not at all," replied Linda. "You told me, Loo, not two minutes since, that you had performed your part. You told me that, positively. So did Lotty. I give you the benefit of your assertion. I couldn't allow the wager to be off without accusing you both of direct untruth. Win the gloves and wear them! If with a good conscience, so much the better. If not, I give you joy of your spoils."

"As you please," replied Lotty, viciously. "I dare say you'll win yet. You made a famous beginning."

At this moment, Mrs. Buttermere entered the room rather in a fuss. It was twenty minutes past two—and no sign of the Bunnytails.

As there will be some further demand upon your patience, and I cannot expect you to consume the interval in merely

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watching the clock, I will take the opportunity of explaining how it was that Linda had counted so securely upon her success with Petersfeld. Of course you have already guessed the truth in part.

It happened that, a few evenings before, Mr. Eldon Bloss, barrister-at-law, whose name I have already had occasion to mention, had been her partner in a quadrille at a certain *soirée dansante*.

Now, Mr. Eldon was one of those free and easy, dashing, affable young bucks, whose boast it is, in their own phrase to be able to tell you what's o'clock about everything, and who are always so anxious to do it. They form such a distinct, well-recognised class in British society, that it is scarcely worth while to define it carefully; but they all dress gaily—converse tremendously—tell funny stories to gentle-

men and talk slang to ladies, and otherwise exhibit the hearty exuberance of unembarrassed people who are delighted to find themselves at once ornamental, amusing, and instructive.

And Mr. Eldon was a brilliant specimen of his order. I never yet talked to him for five minutes together without being enriched by a comic anecdote, a conundrum, and a tip for the Derby. And upon standing up with Linda in the quadrille, after having had, as he expressed it, rather more 'cham' than commonly fell to his luck, he poured forth a torrent of small-talk with even more than his usual volubility. The fact is, he admired Linda immensely, a distinction of which the young lady was perfectly conscious; and always alluded to her as 'a stunner,' of which she was also aware. And this, though it did not by any means

lead to a return of admiration, made her feel not altogether displeased with his company.

At last, in a rash attempt to establish something like a confidential relation between himself and his partner, the infatuated youth, quite forgetting his papa's solemn injunctions to secrecy, related, during fits of the quadrille, the desperate enterprise upon which Petersfeld was bound.

The fact is that Petersfeld was a man whom every one in the 'Devil's Own,' and almost everybody in Lincoln's Inn, knew perfectly well by name and sight. And without (at least to my knowledge) being aware that he was at that moment engaged to dinner in Harley Street, Mr. Eldon naturally supposed that Linda would like to hear something diverting of so distinguished a character.

Stories of this description seldom lose in the telling; especially when the narrator happens to be quite reckless of truth—dying to astonish a beauty, and only imperfectly sober.

Petersfeld, for, to give zest to his story, the scamp unscrupulously let out his name, was represented as consumed by a devouring passion, all the more intolerable from the fact that he had never yet beheld the object of his devotion. The latter was rapidly pictured as a perfect blaze of youthful loveliness, with half-a-pound of diamonds in her dress-pocket and her crinoline crackling with bank-notes.

Wonderful revelations touching people of high rank might shortly be expected; but whether Petersfeld would succeed or not, was, in Mr. Eldon's opinion, a toss-up. His own impression was, that his prospects

were decidedly fishy, and he had good reason for thinking so. "Only pray, my dear Miss Buttermere, keep this entirely between ourselves. The governor, you see, let it out, quite promiscuous, last night—the fact is, it was a great deal too rich not to tell, particularly after I'd seen his name in the advertisement. Only he made me swear so solemnly that I wouldn't allow it to go one inch further, that—I'm sure you quite understand," concluded the prodigal son with a delicate leer.

"I understand," replied Linda. "You have kept your secret: and I am to keep mine."

Mr. Bloss, junior, would have liked to suggest that he had only been forestalling the day when all his own reservations might be Linda's as of right. It seemed rather premature, however, to allude to that pro-

blematical era, and he wisely let it alone, casting about rather hazily for a rejoinder to his partner's last reply.

I wonder whether many people recollect an episode in 'Thomson's Seasons,' which has just come into my mind. 'Thomson's Seasons' was our poetry-book at school; and I once knew the whole four by heart—a dreadful acquisition.

A young lover, Damon by name, wandering absently through a wood, suddenly comes upon his beloved Musidora, who happens to be at the moment enjoying herself in the river.

Even Paul Pry himself, one would think, might under the circumstances have had the grace to retire and hold his tongue. Not so, Master Damon, who, after indulging in a good long look, whips out his writing-case and describes his sensations in an amorous

ditty, which he carefully commits to the water. The lady, seeing a piece of paper float by, naturally examines it, and finds her curiosity rewarded by a compliment in blank verse.

Upon this she good-naturedly returns to shore, and, after due precaution, let us hope, against catching cold, engraves with a 'sylvan pen' (whatever that may mean) a neat inscription upon the trunk of the nearest tree; ending with the encouraging pentameter :—

“Dear youth, the time may come you need not fly!”

This, of course, after a decent interval, is perused by the lover, who with due admiration for the maidenly reserve which sheltered itself so vaguely in the future, must have been inquisitive as to what he would, some day or other, be permitted to stay for.

I suspect that, if Mr. Eldon Bloss had ventured upon putting his first idea into English, he would scarcely have been met by so flattering a reply. At all events he contented himself with answering, "Well hang it, Miss Buttermere, what's a man fit for if he can't tell who to trust and who not? If I was wrong just now, you tell me so, and I'll knock under at once!"

"Not wrong at all, Mr. Bloss," replied Linda, laughing, as she recollected that Petersfeld was asked to their next dinner party, when she would in all probability find herself next him at table. It naturally occurred to her what immense fun she might have with that young gentleman, by pretending to know a great deal more than she did, and mystifying him in the most delightful manner. "Not wrong at all. Only you haven't told me her name yet."

"Couldn't, at any price," replied Mr. Eldon Bloss. "Governor would cut me off with ninepence if he only came to hear of it."

"O, very well!" said Linda. "You said something just now about knowing whom you could trust, whom not. But never mind."

"Well, here goes," replied Mr. Eldon, desperately:—

"In for a penny—in for a pound!

Better be hung for a horse than a hound!"

Miss Helen Fleetlands is her name. Lives at Riverwood Lawn, near St. Mark's-on-the-Sea. Now I've been and gone and done it, by jingo! Fui—ivi—feci! as Julius Cæsar used to say. If you go and betray me, Miss Buttermere, you'll effect the ruin of one who—would rather die than do as

much for you," concluded the young gentleman, devoutly wishing that he dared say more.

I am quite sure, and I hope my reader will be of the same opinion, that nothing more than mere childish frolic had in the first instance entered Linda's little head. It was not until she was provoked beyond endurance by the conduct of her sisters that she ever dreamt of putting her new knowledge to what will, I am afraid, be considered an unscrupulous use.

But we have been absent long enough from the Buttermere drawing-room. Just before three o'clock when everybody's patience was exhausted, and speculations as to what papa would say, when he heard how the horses had been treated, were becoming serious, a tremendous clatter in the street brought everybody to the window.

A bright yellow chariot, with a post-boy in pink jacket and shiny white hat, with a satin rosette in his button-hole, came galloping gaily over the stones with Mrs. Bunnet bawling at the top of her voice from the open window. The vehicle dashed rapidly past the house, and then, as if in obedience to the unceasing vociferations of the pilot in the cabin, wheeled suddenly round, performed a figure of eight in no time, and finally pulled up at the door; the horses, for the matter of steam and lather, looking as if they had just come out of a wash-tub.

“Good heavens!” gasped Mrs. Buttermere. “This dreadful woman will ruin us all! Ring the bell, one of you—do! Send her away! Tell her it’s the wrong door!—O how abominably drunk he is!”

Even the post-boy, at whom this last re-

mark was directed, could hardly have disputed its accuracy. Nobody was more sensible of the fact; but as to not being able to see straight, or drive straight, or being ever so thoroughly all right in his life, he would have argued with you as long as he could hiccup.

“ Well, dear Carlo,” exclaimed the robust lady, as, panting and breathless, she bustled into the drawing-room, “ here we are, at last, you see, and goodness only knows what a job we’ve had to get here. It was no fault of mine, I do assure you, only all the livery-stable’s glass coaches had gone to the wedding, and we were to have the first that came home, and come home he didn’t till two o’clock, and then as tipsy as you please, saying ‘you’re another!’ when I told him to drive to Harley Street, and then driving right away to Harlesden Green, and

wouldn't pull up for all I could screech, till he ran into the baker just by the cemetery, with such a to-do as you never heard. Say good afternoon to your aunt, my dears," continued she, presenting three impish-looking children. "Only I haven't told you one half the man did, Carlo, or how he rode seven times at full gallop round a long church in a gravel square, which of course couldn't be right anyhow; and so I told him, and made him stop and hire a sober man for sixpence to sit upon the dickey-box and call the way till we got to the top of Harley Street. O my! what a jaunt we've had."

It took some time to convince Mrs. Bunnytail of the necessity of dismissing her egregious charioteer upon the spot, and still more to induce the latter to depart. In fact, resenting a direction to that effect

as simply personal, he was in the act of charging in at the hall-door, glass-coach and all, when a policeman interfered, and he accepted his situation.

“Well, if you must send for a cab, send for No. 999, Carlo—do! It’s a nice curly man that don’t charge more than his fare, and brought us from Shoreditch station yesterday sen’night, with a blast in his eye, but quite civil. Send for him, won’t you?”

Even this question was adjusted at last, and the whole party deposited at the gate of the Zoological Gardens.

At this juncture the small Bunnetail fry naturally began to be uproarious. Potty, Fly, and Loop seemed to be the calls to which they severally answered, puppy-dog fashion; but what may have been their real names—what their ages—what their gen-

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ders,—I don't pretend to have the slightest conception. However, the first glimpse of the 'Sunday Animals' as, from Noah-Archical associations, probably, they at once christened them, had a sobering effect, and caused them to behave with respectful curiosity during the greater part of their visit.

Never were two young ladies more deservedly surprised and discomfited than were Loo and Lotty, as, just opposite the lion's den, they recognised Petersfeld, evidently got up for the occasion. His glossy new hat—his bright gloves—his whole aspect in short, all told a tale to which they found it most intolerable to listen. And when, after paying his respects to their mamma, he made them each a beautiful bow and then shook hands cordially with Linda, they fairly gasped with vexation—not so

much that the gloves were lost, as that Linda was going to be married before them.

Judged by results, this bold experiment of Petersfeld's was little better than a failure. It was in vain that, as Linda had predicted, he followed her about like a show-man. Somehow or another, no reasonable opportunity for anything like private conversation ever presented itself. And although it may be the business of heroes to make opportunities, the manufacture is one which requires a certain amount of leisure, as well as of raw material.

The fact is, that the young lady was not a little afraid of her would-be cavalier. Her conscience told her that she had not only done a foolish thing, but made a serious mistake. What is fun for the evening, may be earnest in the morning, and she was

neither inclined to confess the childish joke in which she had permitted herself to indulge, nor to carry it further in cool blood. So she pretended that the whole care of the children had devolved upon her, and executed her maternal duties with such exasperating fidelity, that she never allowed her little pups to wander beyond ear-shot of their real dam.

Of course this was, literally, nuts for the children, for whose benefit Paul produced shilling after shilling with untiring liberality. Nor was his good-nature allowed to satisfy itself so cheaply, for Mrs. Bunnytail, espying a tempting refreshment counter, availed herself of the opportunity to flop down into a garden seat, and complain of 'a sinking,' which necessarily induced the offer of some restorative. And her smiling admission, that if she took anything in that

line, she was partial to cherry brandy, was justified by the result, for she took four shillings' worth before confessing to being quite beyond the probability of a relapse.

However, she amply repaid Petersfeld for his kind attentions, by the enthusiastic praises of his manner and appearance, which she poured without ceasing into Mrs. Buttermere's ear.

She never had seen such a real noble-looking young gentleman in all her born days—"And my dear Carlo, what a lucky girl is our Linda, to be sure! Not but what you might have told me what was in the wind before this, considering she's my own niece. But town ways are town ways, and I don't pretend to understand everything; only you should have seen them talking on their fingers together all dinner-time, last night. O it was pretty! But

that's nothing to the way he follows her about to-day. That's what I call keeping company in earnest, and no mistake. Bunntail never courted me like that, I promise you, though never was man so set upon woman, as he was upon me, if you'll only believe me, Carlo."

Some philosopher goes so far as to suggest that, in this world of ours, no deed is done, nor word spoken, without leaving its individual impress upon the future, and influencing — imperceptibly perhaps, but inevitably—the entire current of time to come. That the chattering of this foolish woman should have had any influence upon a person of Mrs. Buttermere's tact and experience, may seem in the last degree unlikely—but nevertheless, it was so.

She had, of course, observed the very marked attentions which Petersfeld had paid

Linda, since their first introduction, and had rejoiced over them with considerable pride and pleasure. He was in every respect the very man she wanted—young handsome, fashionable, and with brilliant prospects. But she knew better than to build too much upon the result of a twenty-four hours' acquaintance. For aught she could tell, he might flirt equally with every girl he met, and to do more than float the pious prayer that the end might be as welcome as the beginning, would have been presumptuous.

But the loudly expressed confidence of Mrs. Bunnytall, coinciding as it did with her own newly-formed aspirations, gave to the latter a degree of consistency which they would not otherwise have obtained. People, she recollected, made love just as effectually in the grazing counties, as in

Grosvenor Square, and her sister might be no bad judge in such matters after all. And so, without being in the least aware of it, she allowed the affair—in her own mind—to take a most important slide in the direction of final consummation.

This, however, was not all. What Mrs. Bunnytail had seen, she had seen ; and Mrs. Buttermere knew well enough, that no bribe which London could afford, would induce her to hold her tongue. To assure her that Petersfeld and Linda were not really engaged, would be to waste words. Mrs. Bunnytail had an awkward custom of believing her own eyes. Happen what might, the thing would shortly be as public as if it had been proclaimed in the *Morning Post*.

So she concluded to say as little as possible at the moment, and to discuss the

question of settlements with Mr. Buttermere before she went to bed.

I am sorry to say that both Lotty and Loo, who were in the very worst of tempers, owing to their unexpected defeat, displayed a great deal of acrimony, and some want of self-control, before they got back to Harley Street.

Lotty, for instance, upon being accosted by an unfortunate cockatoo with some harmless personality, knocked the bird off its perch with a blow which might have felled a foot-pad, and upon being remonstrated with by the bird-house keeper, whom she at first addressed defiantly as 'Man,' and afterwards deferentially as 'Mr.,' had to elect in the ignominious alternative of leaving her name and address, or a deposit of one pound fifteen.

Loo made even worse weather of it, for

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whilst chastising Fly within range of the Cassowary's cage, the unlucky child was, as Mrs. Bunnytall comprehensively remarked, 'pecked into fits,' and danced like St. Vitus before it left the gardens.

As to Paul, he had only one momentary chance of private conversation with Linda, which unluckily occurred in the monkey room.

'My dear Miss Linda,' he was just beginning, when a wretched ring-tail made a snatch at the silk tassel of her parasol, with which he went capering away to the top of his cage, to dissect at his leisure, after the careful and deliberate manner with which his brotherhood usually conduct their investigations. Nothing more provoking could possibly have occurred, for to stand by, helpless, in any emergency, makes a man feel seriously ashamed, while to interfere—

had such a course been possible—would have been to cover himself with ridicule for ever.

Everything, in short, seemed to have gone wrong, and it was a relief when, after handing the ladies into their carriages, he watched them drive away.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN a man is 'out of suits with fortune'—unless matters are very serious indeed—he naturally goes to his club. There is a fine bracing atmosphere about these institutions, in which we generally revive.

Paul went to his club, won a game at billiards, dined, and was himself again. His afternoon had been unproductive, but what of that? Great results were not to be obtained by magic, and when one course failed, the obvious expedient was to try another. Except for that miserable monkey, what might he not have known at that

moment. No matter. He would know it yet. He had only to write to Linda, and of course she'd reply, with full particulars, by return of post.

It never once occurred to him that such a proceeding would be either unusual or indiscreet, or demand more than the mere semblance of an apology. The only danger which suggested itself was, that his letter might possibly fall into wrong hands. He had a vague idea that the correspondence of young ladies was occasionally visé by their mammas, so he resolved to express himself with caution.

He wouldn't trust himself to write from his club. In the quiet of his own rooms he would be better able to concoct a letter, which he fully expected would elicit the grand secret.

Unluckily, just as he sat down to his

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desk in the Albany, his mental serenity was unpleasantly disturbed. A letter which he had carelessly torn open, as an unmistakable circular, turned out to be of a much less innocent description. It was from his tailor.

Bags was perfectly civil, but at the same time business-like and brief. He reminded Paul that his account had been running considerably over two years. He apologized for troubling him with the well-worn tradesman fib of having a large demand to meet in the course of the following week: and concluded with a formal request for fifty pounds at least on account by Monday.

Nothing could have been more vexatious. Paul's allowance was by no means an illiberal one, but he spent it recklessly, and never had money in hand. One solitary twenty-pound note, with about a dozen

stray sovereigns, was all that he could muster at the moment. The former he had set aside, some time before, towards the expense of a Swiss walk in the Long Vacation. It was a fine financial precaution. So long as you regard a twenty-pound note as mere inconvertible paper — not to be touched upon any account until a given day, it is tolerably certain to be forthcoming when wanted. Twenty sovereigns are quite another thing, and may be coaxed out, one at a time, upon the most plausible reasons, until there are no more to coax. Now quarter day was several weeks off, and to be obliged to enclose this precious note to his tailor was little less than a calamity.

It had already, as we know, been diverted from its original purpose, and dedicated to the persecution of Miss Fleetlands. Indeed, deprived of its assistance, the whole affair

seemed likely to end in a dead lock. Travelling and bribery are expensive luxuries, and Five Hundred Pound Rewards are not at all to be reckoned upon in one's computation of available cash. Of course, Paul might have borrowed money easily enough ; but, with all his carelessness, he was not donkey enough for that.

Whenever you find yourself dunned in good earnest, and payment quite out of the question, you should meet the matter in a philosophic and comprehensive spirit. Don't be angry with your creditor. " You must think this, look you, that the worm will do his kind," as Cleopatra's clown had the good sense to remind her. You must recollect also, that nothing is more vulgar than to be always flush of money, except the baseness of treating the want of it as an inconvenience, either to yourself or anybody

else. Try a frank genial course ; with nothing provoking—still less anything penitential about it. Make the fellow feel that you're all serene yourself about the matter, and ten to one he won't give needless trouble.

Acting upon this view, Paul wrote a very concise reply to Mr. Bags. 'He was sorry to hear of his difficulty. He lost no time in enclosing the trifle he happened to have about him, and would look into his bill the first moment he had to spare. He should be very sorry to be dressed by anybody but Mr. Bags, who always fitted him so nicely ; but really some of his charges—seven guineas, for instance, for a frock-coat—were more than he had paid, even at Cambridge. He was almost afraid he couldn't afford Mr. Bags.'

These latter sentences, he flattered him-

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self, had a particular solvent sound, and though the sudden apotheosis of his hoarded note was a decided inconvenience, it was useless to send regrets after it, and he set to work upon his letter to Linda.

I should be ashamed to say how many sheets of crested and superfine note paper were destroyed during the composition of this precious document. Nothing within the whole range of his letter-writing experience had approached the difficulty of composing those few lines. Now, he seemed to be saying too much. Another sheet was torn to tatters for saying too little. At last a sort of nightmare-like entanglement crept over his mind, and he grew desperate. So, solemnly vowing that the next sheet should be the last, he wrote a cautious note in the best words he could muster, and carried it, with Mr. Bags' answer, to the post.

I think I have already observed that Linda had her faults. Among these, and let us hope among the worst, was her custom of never appearing at family prayers—or indeed until further delay would have involved the loss of her breakfast.

The fact is, that Buttermere always left home at nine precisely, for his early consultations, and was Turk enough to inflict preposterous matins upon an innocent wife and family. Of course he was quite right in so doing, and Linda quite wrong to rebel; but the little sluggard would neither be coaxed nor scolded into submission, and was at last allowed to persevere, as a pet, in what she called 'her own comfort way.'

"Who's Linda got a letter from, I wonder," observed Lotty, as the footman distributed the produce of the early post.

“Who can she possibly have to direct to her in that great, black, gentleman scrawl, with a seal as big as a tartlet?”

“Let’s look!” exclaimed Loo, seizing the letter in her turn. “What a funny crest! Papa, what does this crest mean—a five-barred gate with two great keys across it?”

“Hey?” replied Buttermere, laying down his newspaper. “Why, I seem to recollect that crest too! O yes! I’ll tell you whose it is. It’s the Petersfeld crest. Don’t you see the gate with the cross-keys of Saint Peter. Peter’s field—that’s it. One of those old fashioned heraldic puns. Why? What the deuce——?”

Positively, if the teapot had begun to talk, or the French rolls to waltz upon the table, a quiet family could hardly have looked more astounded over their breakfast

than did the Buttermeres at this simple information.

A letter from Petersfeld ! Why he hadn't been introduced to Linda forty-eight hours ago. This was bringing her down with a snap shot, and no mistake. Proposing by letter too ! Mrs. Buttermere gasped a gasp of mingled thankfulness and bewilderment, whilst Lotty and Loo scarcely dared to exchange glances, in the depth of their utter discomfiture.

To be deliberately cut out, in this cool easy way, and probably have to stand up as Linda's bridesmaids within a month, was too much for their philosophy.

As to papa, he looked at his wife and daughters with a puzzled and anxious expression, and pushed away his plate.

Just at this moment Linda came fluttering into the room, fresh and buoyant as the morning.

"Good morning, everybody! Good morning, papa!" accompanying the latter benediction with a kiss. "Late again, am I? Well, this time, I'm sure it wasn't my fault, at all events. Why, good gracious, how dreadfully circumspect you all look! quite guilty, I declare! What on earth is the matter? What is it, mamma?"

"There's a letter for you, Linda," observed Lotty, maliciously.

"A letter, is there?" replied Linda, glancing at the address. "Only a bill, I daresay, and I want my breakfast." Her quick instinct instantly told her that this letter had excited unusual curiosity; which, without having, at the moment, the slightest suspicion as to who her correspondent might be, she quietly determined to disappoint.

Lotty and Loo bit their lips with vexation, as Linda, slipping the mysterious docu-

ment into her pocket, ate her toast and drank her coffee, all serenity and good nature, and with even more deliberation than usual. At last the time arrived for Buttermere to be off to his clients, and Linda, who, with all her external self-control, was burning with impatience to know what they had all looked so cunning about, soon satisfied her curiosity, upon the music-stool in the back drawing-room.

“My good gracious—a twenty pound note!” exclaimed she, as she pulled the crisp bank paper out of the envelope. “Well, I never saw a twenty pound note before, in all my life! Who in the world can have sent it?”

At the sight of Petersfeld’s name she started violently. She felt her colour go—whilst every whiff of breath seemed for the moment out of her body. Her fun appeared,

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indeed, likely to have a serious result. She hastily ran her eye over the following words, and felt stupefied :—

“ Albany,
“ Saturday.

“ MY DEAR MISS BUTTERMERE,

“ I am most anxious to press for an answer to a question of the very deepest interest to myself personally.

“ You cannot but be aware of the subject to which I refer, and I most earnestly beg that you will either indulge me with a few moments’ private conversation, when and where you please, or set my mind at rest by writing unreservedly. I trust that you will not be offended by my venturing to send you a note ; but our conversation yesterday was so vexatiously interrupted that I had no opportunity of saying verbally all I had intended, and accomplishing the purpose for

which, in truth, I awaited you at the gardens. I believe that you will neither misunderstand me nor misconstrue my motives in thus addressing you; and again apologising for the liberty which I fear I am taking, remain, my dear Miss Buttermere, yours most sincerely,

“PAUL G. PETERSFELD.”

Now, considering what had passed between himself and Linda with reference to Miss Fleetlands, not twenty-four hours before he sat down to write the above, I think that Paul was not altogether unreasonable in supposing that his meaning was beyond mistake. Linda had herself told him that he must find some other opportunity of continuing their conversation; and, after having failed at the Zoological Gardens, it was the most natural thing in the world that, to avoid an indefinite loss of time, he should

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address her in writing. In fact, his letter would have been perfectly intelligible, had he not, with wonted alacrity in blundering, carelessly thrust his twenty pound note into its envelope, instead of that directed to his tailor, previously to sealing them both.

It was exactly the thing which anybody who knew his ways as well as I, might almost have counted upon his doing; and yet, considering that an average of many hundred letters, containing notes or money, are annually posted without any direction at all, we must not be too hasty in deciding who is, or is not, fit to be entrusted with pen and ink.*

* During two consecutive years, ten thousand pounds worth of property was actually enclosed in blank envelopes, and posted within the United Kingdom. Any one who may be curious to find this astounding fact philosophically accounted for, may, perhaps, like to refer to an article (I believe by the late Sir Francis Head) in the *Quarterly Review*, Vol. lxxxvii., p. 83.

"I trust you will not be offended at my venturing to send you a note."

Linda read these astonishing words three times over, with perpetually increasing bewilderment.

What could they possibly mean?

At first a confused suspicion that he might be attempting to purchase her supposed knowledge with a twenty pound bribe, entered her puzzled little head. Gentlemen, she was aware, habitually did very odd things, but surely nothing so offensive as that.

Perhaps he was eccentric. Eccentric people went up in balloons—got good-humouredly fined at police courts, and probably forwarded bank-notes gratis to favourite ladies. But this supposition was as absurd as the former.

And then the overwhelming possibility

that, after all, the money might actually have been intended for herself, sent the blood flushing and throbbing to her very temples. What did he mean by saying, "I had no opportunity of saying verbally all I intended, and accomplishing the purpose for which, in truth, I awaited you at the gardens?"

Could it be possible that his presence there had been prompted by feelings of which she was herself the object? Improbable as this might seem, she knew that Petersfeld would never have been invited to dine in Harley Street, unless he had been regarded by her parents as perfectly at liberty to make himself agreeable either to herself or her sisters. Indeed, it might be that he had even received her papa's formal assent to consider himself as her suitor. But the whole business was so wild and

unintelligible that she laid the letter down with a sigh of despair, and wished herself several weeks older.

It was most unfortunate for Linda that in so critical a conjuncture she had no trustworthy friend to whom she could appeal for advice. Her sisters were out of the question. To go to her mamma, without showing the letter and explaining the foolish mystification which she had put upon Petersfeld, would have been useless. To make a clean breast of it would have been simply to ensure herself a sound scolding—all the sounder indeed from the fact that her mamma would, as she was well aware, have been if possible still more puzzled than her daughter. For Mrs. Buttermere's gift was not in the way of expounding parables; which not only perplexed her, but made her very angry and unreasonable.

What would she not have given to have awakened suddenly, and found the whole affair a dream, and the bank-note an illusion ! But after having convinced herself by experiment that she was so perfectly wide awake that any further development in that line was out of the question, and recollecting that Petersfeld's communication demanded an immediate reply of some kind, she determined, as the only resource, to place herself at once under the guidance of Mrs. Springletop, a young married lady of her acquaintance who lived in Portland Place, not many hundred yards off.

Mrs. Springletop, whose name has already appeared in these pages, was very young, very fashionable, and very strongly impressed with a conviction of her own profound knowledge of the world and its ways, and consequent ability to give valuable advice.

Nothing could have delighted her more than to see Linda arrive on her early visit, with a letter in her hand and a question to ask.

“O my goodness, what a bear! I never saw anything so delightful—never since I was christened,” laughed Mrs. Springletop, handing back Paul’s unfortunate missive with its enclosed bank-note. “It’s the King of the Cannibal Islands all over! Does he mean to buy you right away for twenty pounds—or is it only so much board-wages to begin upon? Why didn’t he accomplish his purpose, poor darling, at the Zoological Gardens? and what was the vexations interruption he makes such a fuss about? Do tell me more about him. I only wish to goodness he’d write to me!”

“My dear Fanny, please be serious. You

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see I must return this money by the very next post; and I don't know what in the world to say to him about it. I want you to help me. I have no one else to ask."

"Quite right to come to me, my dear," returned Mrs. Springletop, playfully. "Particularly, since after seeing what I couldn't help seeing, at your house the other night, I quite expected that something of this sort would happen in the course of a week. But, as to returning the note, that's fiddlestick! Don't begin by sending young gentlemen to the right-about like that, my dear, or you may die an old maid."

"Never mind what you saw at our house. That was all nonsense. Mr. Petersfeld fancied that I knew a secret about a friend of his, and was trying all the evening to get it out of me. That was all. And I'm quite certain, that's what he's writing about

now. But why should he send me this wretched bank-note, and talk as he does," continued Linda, ready to cry with vexation. "I'll send it back in a blank envelope and have done with it!"

"You won't do anything half so foolish, my dear," replied her sagacious adviser. "If you do, he'll have done with *you*: you may depend upon that. I declare I won't have you snub such a nice, affable, generous bear upon any account. Send back twenty-pound notes indeed! I can assure you they're not always to be had for the asking. I know I've heard my husband say it's a maxim in the City—'Never refuse money;' and it seems sensible enough. Mr. Petersfeld, who's a barrister, will think you a ninny if you do. Besides, it would just be a simple affront, let alone the cruelty of the thing."

"There could be no cruelty, so far as I am concerned," said Linda; "but O how I wish he would only have let me alone!"

"Let you alone, indeed! I don't advise you to count upon being let alone much, so long as you wear that little face! I really can't help laughing at the drollery of the thing," continued Mrs. Springletop, "but I declare I quite love him for his simplicity. I'll answer for it he was at his wits' end to know what present to make, so he judiciously sent the money instead, that you might choose for yourself."

"It seems so very unlike him," began Linda——

"O, if you dislike him," returned Mrs. Springletop, pretending to misunderstand, "that's another pair of shoes altogether!"

"I never said that:—I said——"

"O, in that case, never mind what you

said. Don't stand in your own light, my dear Linda. It's only returning presents, you know, if the worst comes to the worst."

"But what must I *do*," persisted Linda, fairly driven to desperation. "See, the morning is passing, and the post will be going, and I must do something, right or wrong!"

"You shall do quite right," replied Mrs. Springletop, ringing the bell, "if you'll only leave it all to me. Do you think I don't understand a little affair of this kind? Trust me, my dear, and don't fidget yourself. The brougham will be round in ten minutes, and then I'll show you exactly what to do."

Linda was by no means satisfied: indeed quite the reverse. But as a skipper blown out of his reckoning into some unknown

and reef-sprinkled channel, will take any man on board who declares himself a pilot, and leave him at the wheel so long as he continues to bellow orders with unabated confidence, so she reluctantly, and as an only resource, placed herself unreservedly in Mrs. Springletop's hands.

She did not deceive herself into supposing that she was acting rightly in so doing. But what else could she do? She acted just as our forefathers, about whose wisdom we are so fond of moralizing, used to act, when they found themselves engaged in what, by a charitable euphuism was distinguished as 'an affair of honour.' So soon as matters took a gunpowder turn, and the question had clearly outgrown the stage of foolscap and armorial seals, they committed themselves, soul and body, into the hands of a second. In the prospect of sub-

sequently getting shot at short notice, it was a grand point to be able to indulge in the school-boy consolation—‘it wasn’t their look out.’ Whatever might be their private likes or otherwise with regard to that contingency, personal responsibility was the one thing intolerable.

Paul sat at breakfast, next morning, alone in his Albanian quarters, waiting impatiently for the post. He was just beginning to wonder whether it could possibly have passed without bringing him a line from Linda, when a twin tap at his door, and a flutter in his letter-box, decided the question. There were two letters—one directed in his tailor’s flourishing scrawl, the other a delicate little pink note, addressed to him in a pretty, young-lady-like hand. In the excitement of the moment he felt as if he scarcely dared to open it,

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and mechanically began to examine the contents of Mr. Bags' despatch. To his dismay and astonishment it ran as follows :

" SIR,

" Your favour of this day's date to hand ; stating that you enclose the trifle you have about you on account of bill delivered. Am sorry to say your letter contains no remittance, and not being a jocular party myself, and pressed for money, can't see the pleasantry as you might wish. Must request, therefore, that you will favour me with draft for entire amount of bill delivered, £84 16s., (say eighty-four pounds sixteen shillings) in the course of to-morrow, or shall with great reluctance be obliged to commence usual proceedings, and remain, sir, your obedient servant,

" B. BAGS.

" To Paul Petersfeld, Esq., Albany, S.W."

Paul read this letter in stupid bewilderment. His note, which he perfectly recollected enclosing, must have been stolen in the post. But what a miserable scrape to be in. Things were bad enough before; but now it looked as if his grand adventure were ruined altogether. Almost recklessly he tore open Linda's dainty envelope, for let it contain what information it might, this hideous tailor had ruined him for the rest of the quarter.

Twenty pounds gone already, and eighty-four to be raised in the course of the morning was a financial crash upon which he had not calculated.

But if he was disagreeably astonished at Mr. Bags's letter, he was thunderstruck upon reading as follows—written, as you may suppose, under Mrs. Springletop's dictation :—

“DEAR MR. PETERSFELD,

“I ought to be very angry with you for sending me a twenty-pound bank note, and my first intention was to return it to you immediately. But that, I suppose, you would have resented as an affront, so I have lost no time in devoting it to the only purpose for which it could possibly have been intended. Next time we meet I shall have the pleasure of showing you the most beautiful emerald bracelet, and such a love of a lace parasol, to make amends for the one which you allowed the monkey to ruin. I am only sorry that, since you chose to make me such a splendid present, you did not add to its value by choosing it yourself. But, after all, the things could scarcely have been prettier than they are. You talk of an interview in your note, which, I suppose is to give me the

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opportunity of thanking you in person.

Believe me,

“Yours very truly,

“LINDA BUTTERMERE.”

Let us drop the curtain upon Act the first. When it rises again, our prima donna shall at last appear upon the stage.

CHAPTER XV.

HELEN FLEETLANDS first saw the light in a pretty green bungalow, with infinite verandas, which looked out upon the flaming waves of the Bay of Bengal.

Her father's history is briefly told. A soldier of fortune—in other words, a soldier with no fortune at all—he found himself, after a quarter of a century of Indian life, in command of a cavalry regiment in the Company's service. In broken health, he was obliged to relinquish his career, and consoled himself with a late marriage. A

child was born—a wife died, and the worn-out soldier simply awaited a fate in Hindostan, which his doctors plainly told him was beyond challenge either in India or elsewhere.

The new house at Cossambazar in which he had intended to live, was the new house in which it only remained for him to die; and, with quiet soldierly fortitude, he resigned himself to his doom.

A brother-officer, whom he could implicitly trust, had promised to take charge of little Helen when the time came, and bring her up among his own children; and Colonel Fleetlands' last and all absorbing object was so to arrange matters that she should have some sort of independence of her own—enough, at all events, to enable her to live modestly in England, without the necessity either of toiling or marrying

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for bread, or of drifting miserably through life in that most pitiable of all capacities, a poor relation.

His ambition, in short, was, to secure her a clear annual income of two thousand rupees (two hundred pounds sterling, or thereabouts); and to effect this the dying man denied himself, not only everything in the shape of indulgence, but many things which, in his condition, were almost among the necessities of life. He had never saved before; in fact his opportunities in that direction had not been encouraging; and the freshly awakened impulse took possession of him like a mania. His table was daily littered with papers covered with calculations in rupees, annas, and pice, as to the exact rate of his expenditure, the degree in which his savings were rolling up, and the number of months which he must con-

trive to live, before he could die with his work done.

Neither were these computations quite so simple as might, at first sight, be supposed. His design was to leave the entire amount of his property to the friend who was to be Helen's guardian, in trust to accumulate so much of the interest as should not be required for her maintenance and education, at compound interest for her benefit.

During the earlier years of her life, living as she would among other children, a great deal would of course be saved. Gradually her clothing and education would become more expensive ; but still, after allowing for every probable deduction, and reckoning interest at five per cent., the prospect that, at one-and-twenty, she would be mistress of a capital representing two hundred

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pounds a-year, became at last, little short of a certainty. He had only to live a few months longer. Another half-year's pension drawn, and the thing was done.

And Colonel Fleetlands did live, as strong-hearted men, determined to accomplish their work below, sometimes contrive to live, in spite of the soundest medical advice to the contrary. He lived to see the day when seated in his veranda, with a pile of papers upon the table before him, he could at last exclaim, "Thank God, my task is finished! Helen will not be a pauper. With common economy, and reasonable care of her money during infancy, she will at one-and-twenty, have a clear four thousand pounds of her own—two hundred pounds a-year, at five per cent. Heaven knows the struggle it has cost me to bring her income up to this. But I would go through it all

again—aye, ten times over, rather than die without having done thus much for my darling. I would do more if I could : but I cannot now—there is no time. I must rest before I die.”

As Colonel Fleetlands sank languidly back in his arm-chair, there was a sharp rattle of buggy-wheels over the gravel in the compound, followed by loud and lively conversation in the same direction. In another moment a visitor was announced.

“Jump is my name, if you’ll allow me, Colonel,” said a smart nattily dressed little man, flourishing his straw hat with an obsequious wave in the direction of Colonel Fleetlands ; “firm of Joy, Jingle, and Jump, Calcutta. You know us by name, I dare say—Joy, Jingle, and Jump, my dear sir?”

Any body could have seen at once that

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Mr. Jump had some tremendously interesting intelligence to communicate. It was beaming out of his eyes, fluttering upon his tongue, and tingling to his very finger-ends. But like a child who can never tell a piece of news without first insisting upon one guess at least, Mr. Jump couldn't help coquetting with his secret, and repeating 'Joy, Jingle, and Jump?' with his head on one side, and a provoking smile. This first step in the riddle had, however, been unluckily chosen.

"I have reason to recollect your firm," returned the sick officer slowly. "Several years ago, I accepted a bill for a friend of mine—a young fellow in our dragoons, and the paper got into your hands. You didn't show me much mercy. It was a rascally transaction, and you knew and know it. Don't stand there grinning. I've had quite

enough of your firm. Go away and write to me, if you've anything to say. Do you hear? I have but a few days left, and each moment has its value now."

"O, my dear colonel!" exclaimed Mr. Jump—shocked beyond measure at this frightful allusion to an affair which he had long since forgotten—"pray forgive us if any such thing ever occurred! I give you my honour I wasn't in the concern at the time—never even heard of it. I've come now, sir, with the most splendid news for you, and do hope and trust you'll allow me the great satisfaction of delivering it personally. I've come all the way to Cossambazar, colonel, for that very purpose. The idea of my firm having ever sued you upon a trumpery bill! It's the very best joke I ever heard—the very best, indeed!"

"It was a very indifferent one at the

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time," observed Colonel Fleetlands dryly.

"We will not joke again, if you please."

"Certainly not, colonel. Certainly not. My firm—to which I won't allude again for one moment—received, by last mail, from Mr. Bloss, of New Square, Lincoln's Inn, our London correspondent, a letter directed to yourself, together with certain documents which we were instructed to lay before you. The letter," continued Mr. Jump, opening his black leather bag, "is here. The documents are these. And now, my dear colonel, will you allow me the pleasure of communicating the purport of this glorious intelligence myself?"

"Mr. Jump, there can be no glorious intelligence for me, in this world. I have not long to live, and can only attend to business which it may be my duty to transact. Give me the letter which you tell me

is addressed to me, and suffer me to read it quietly. My servants will show you every attention, and the house is at your service. But let me read this letter alone."

"Certainly, colonel, certainly," replied his visitor rising. "Only allow me to fulfil Mr. Bloss's particular desire, that I should wish you, from him, health and long life to enjoy your good fortune, and to do as much upon my own account, colonel."

"You are wasting good wishes, but I am obliged. Is it the Mr. Bloss, I wonder, whom I remember long—long ago, a remarkably stout young man?"

"The same, colonel—the same! Oh dear yes! Sent us his *carte-de-visite* by the mail before last. Not so young now as he was, but an elephant-and-castle to look at. Quite so, colonel."

"Pray, Mr. Jump, call for whatever you

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require, and use my house as your own. Excuse a dying man; I would rather be alone at present."

And so, whilst Mr. Jump revelled in pale ale and cigars in an adjoining apartment, Colonel Fleetlands' thin fingers broke the broad black seal, and he read news which for the moment seemed to transfix him to his chair.

The letter was dated from New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and headed

'RE NETTLETON, DECEASED.'

Instead of merely copying the document verbatim, I shall take the liberty of giving you its purport, premising a few facts, without which its entire significance could scarcely be understood.

Some five-and-twenty years before the date of which I am now speaking, Colonel

Fleetlands, then a frank, fair-haired lad of eighteen, upon the point of embarking for India, had been a great favourite with the dead Nettleton. They were distantly connected, but no more; only just enough to suggest a sort of indistinct family tie. However, Nettleton, a jolly, luxurious bachelor—a wharfinger, I believe he called himself—liked the boy, asked him to dinners, took him to prize-fights, tipped him with sovereigns, and otherwise treated him with great good-nature.

One day Mr. Nettleton suddenly took it into his head to make his will. He had found reasons for so doing, which may now be left in peace. Obligations which lawyers distinguish as ‘moral’ are sometimes, by less educated people, called by less edifying names. At all events, to provide a life income for a certain interesting annuitant,

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Mr. Nettleton held himself in conscience bound, and sent for Mr. Bloss—then in the first bloom of his attorneyhood—to compose a testament accordingly.

The annuity was provided—a few unimportant legacies given, and then—

“How about the residue? We must have a residuary legatee, my dear sir,” suggested Mr. Bloss, suddenly pausing and placing his pen across his mouth.

“What’s that?” demanded the testator.

“Somebody to take the balance—pick up the crumbs, as it were, in case the bequests already made should fail to exhaust your entire fortune. It is usual to name somebody.”

“I’ve left all I have. I can’t leave more.”

“There may be more to come,” urged Mr. Bloss. “Better put a name in, in case.”

"Name little Ned Fleetlands," replied Mr. Nettleton. "Nice young fellow, that. If there's anything over, let him have it. Much good may it do him."

To tell the truth, had the will-maker died then and there, Colonel Fleetlands' residuary expectations would have been dearly purchased at an outlay of eighteen-pence. But Mr. Nettleton did not so die. He lived to coin money for many a long year, and to see his business extend and flourish in a degree of which he had never indulged the faintest anticipation. Moreover, the fair legatee, for whose benefit the whole will had been projected, died in his lifetime, so that, in default of any later disposition—which he never made—the provision destined for herself, as well as the entire bulk of his general property, devolved upon his residuary legatee—in other words,

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passed to Colonel Fleetlands for his own absolute use and benefit.

In fact, the purport of Mr. Bloss's letter was to inform him that he was, at that moment, master of trade property and premises worth some sixty thousand pounds at the least, of ten thousand pounds in stocks and shares, of thirty years' lease of a mansion in Bryanston Square with all its furniture, carriages, horses, and six hundred dozen of wine, of a fishing-box in the neighbourhood of Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, North Wales, and a shooting-box at Fort George in the Highlands, with sundry little pickings, not yet estimated, but which might be taken as from eight to twelve thousand additional. That was all.

Strangely as it may sound, Colonel Fleetlands' first emotion, upon realising the extent of this astounding windfall, was one of

intense and overwhelming vexation. He had tasted the delights of saving—a passion, by the way, which, once encouraged, will take root and run to seed just as surely as drinking, gambling, debauchery, or any other exceptional human indulgence. He had lived, as it were, with Helen's little hoard before him, enjoying, day by day, its slow but steady increase. He had counted no piece of self-sacrifice too severe which only added a couple of annas to the pile. More than that, he had succeeded. He had made her independent.

And now, as if in mockery of all his toil, came this immense fortune tumbling in, a solid mass of wealth, from which every fragment of his miserable savings—aye, multiplied fifty fold—might be chipped away without leaving it sensibly less than before. He had worked and suffered for nothing.

So, at least, he mistakenly felt at the moment.

Another, and far more bitter feeling, only too naturally crossed his mind. Why had it come so late? Three years ago it might have carried him home to England, with blessed hopes of life and health. Much more. She for whom his heart still silently bled, might have been at that moment in bloom and beauty by his side. Why had it come so late? Again he ground his teeth.

Why had it come at all? Except in so far as little Helen was concerned, it was much as if he had suddenly received commission to divide a great territory in China among the Peacock Mandarins. He could, himself, have neither part nor lot in the inheritance; whilst, as regarded Helen, there were anxieties almost as vivid under her strangely altered prospects, as those which

had tormented him already. If he had dreaded poverty for her, he dreaded friendless wealth still more. He knew no one to whom he could conscientiously entrust the care of a baby heiress, with upwards of a hundred thousand for her marriage portion; nobody who would bring her up as she ought to be brought up—watch her as she ought to be watched—and steer her course through the dangerous morning splendour of such a future.

The only man in England to whom his thoughts pointed, at the moment, was Admiral, then Captain Mortlake, of whom we have already heard. But whether he would like, or even accept, so delicate a task, the Colonel could not know; and, in any event, there were complicated arrangements to be made, contingencies to be guarded against, and an elaborate will prepared be-

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fore it could be even suggested. There was no European lawyer at Cossambazar, and Colonel Fleetlands longed to consult Mr. Jump, whose buggy horse was at that moment panting in the compound before him.

But that hateful bill transaction, of Heaven knows how many years before, still clave to his soul like pitch, and rather than unbosom himself confidentially to one of such a gang of swindlers, as he very naturally considered them, he would, I suspect, have seen Mr. Jump's persuasive countenance revolving in the Hooghly among those of the many native gentlemen who diurnally proceed to sea down that mysterious river.

So he allowed the opportunity to pass unimproved, and dismissed Mr. Jump with a magnificent fee, as became a man who had been so suddenly transformed from a miser into a millionaire.

And then, feeling that his time was short, and that a whole world of responsibility had devolved upon him within the last few hours, he deliberately drew a clean quire of foolscap from his writing-desk, and set to work at once upon his last will and testament.

Perhaps, whilst he is about it, I may be permitted to offer to the unprofessional reader a suggestion or two, gratis, upon a subject respecting which the most serious errors are unluckily prevalent. He may skip the rest of this chapter and welcome, if he please ; and if he can equally contrive to skip the advancing hour, from which, as the law has it, his will must, if he ever make one, ‘ speak,’ his time will be much better occupied in pursuing my story.

But to those who like to listen, I would say : Never suppose that any possible amount of common sense, (whatever that

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may mean), or any quantity of trouble which you may be disposed to take in the matter, is sufficient to enable you to make a will, and defy all the world to pick a hole in it. Eschew the weak belief that you can clearly express your meaning, at all events. In a cursory glance among the books upon my shelves at this moment, I have lit upon half a dozen cases, at least, in which the Court has substantially said, "The meaning of the testator is clear enough, but the words which he has used unfortunately oblige us to disregard it." And the reason of this apparent hardship is so well explained in a standard professional work, which I always consult with pleasure, that I have no hesitation in employing the writer's language instead of my own.

"In construing wills," he remarks, "the Courts have always borne in mind, that a

testator may not have had the same opportunity of legal advice in drawing his will, as he would have had in executing a deed. And the first great maxim of construction accordingly is, that the intention of the testator ought to be observed. The decisions of the courts in pursuing this maxim, have given rise to a number of subsidiary rules, to be applied in making out the testator's intention ; and, when doubts occur, these rules are always made use of to determine the meaning ; so that the true legal construction of a will, is occasionally different from that which would occur to the mind of an unprofessional reader. Certainty cannot be obtained without uniformity, or uniformity without rule. Rules therefore have been found to be absolutely necessary ; and the indefinite maxim of observing the intention is now largely qualified by the

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numerous decisions which have been made respecting all manner of doubtful points, each of which decisions forms or confirms a rule of construction, to be attended to whenever any similar difficulty occurs. It is indeed very questionable, whether this maxim of observing the intention, reasonable as it may appear, has been of any service to testators; and it has certainly occasioned a great deal of trouble to the courts. Testators have imagined that the making of wills to be so leniently interpreted, is a matter to which anybody is competent; and the consequence has been an immense amount of litigation. An intention, moreover, expressed clearly enough for ordinary apprehensions, has often been defeated by some technical rule, too stubborn to yield to the general maxim, that the intention ought to be observed."

And our author, in illustration of his last remark, notices a case, in which a father by his will declared his intention to be, that his son should not sell or dispose of his estate for any longer time than his life; and, *to that intent*, he devised the same to his son, *for life only*; and after his, (the son's) decease, to the heirs of the body of his said son.

Common sense would probably have approved of this disposition, as at once clear and effectual. But common sense and common law are two very different things. The testator had unwarily laid hold of a technical term, and the technical term wouldn't let him go again. And the day of his death beheld his son absolute and irresponsible master of the estate.

Under what inconceivable infatuation, then, do people, in other respects sound in

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mind, careful of their own interests, and not inconsiderate of the welfare of others, sit down daily to make their own wills? How do they excuse to their consciences this most cruel and culpable folly? By what right do they dare expose those for whose benefit they ostensibly put pen to paper, to the unspeakable calamity of a Chancery suit, with all its heart-burnings, misery, and waste? And yet, a thousand times over, has this been the penalty of indiscretion in the use of one single drop of ink. Verily, the man who, for the selfish saving of a miserable fee, can leave his family liable to such horrible hazard, ought to be buried in disgrace, and the reason noticed upon his tombstone.

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